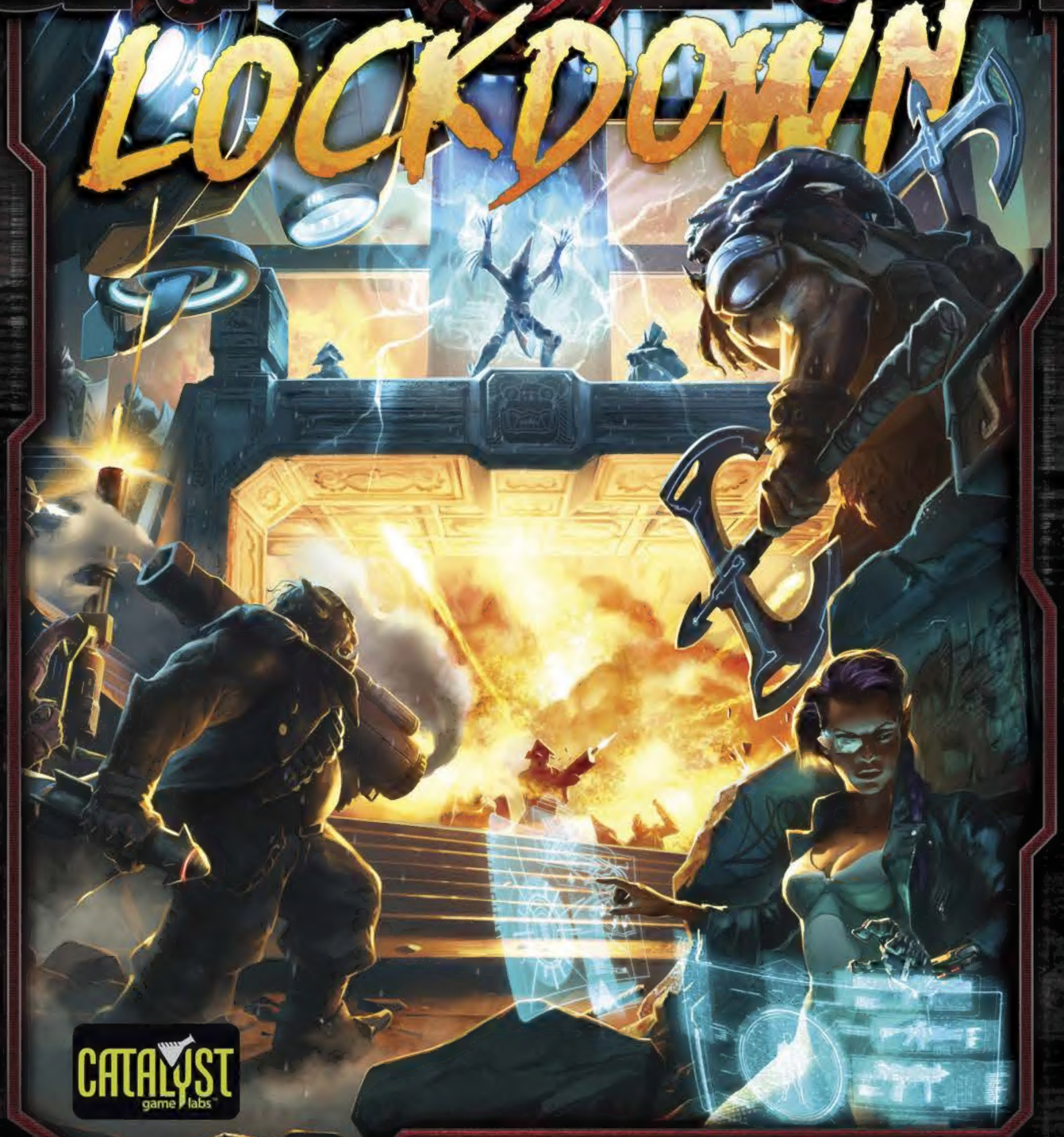
SHADOWRUN

LOCKDOWN



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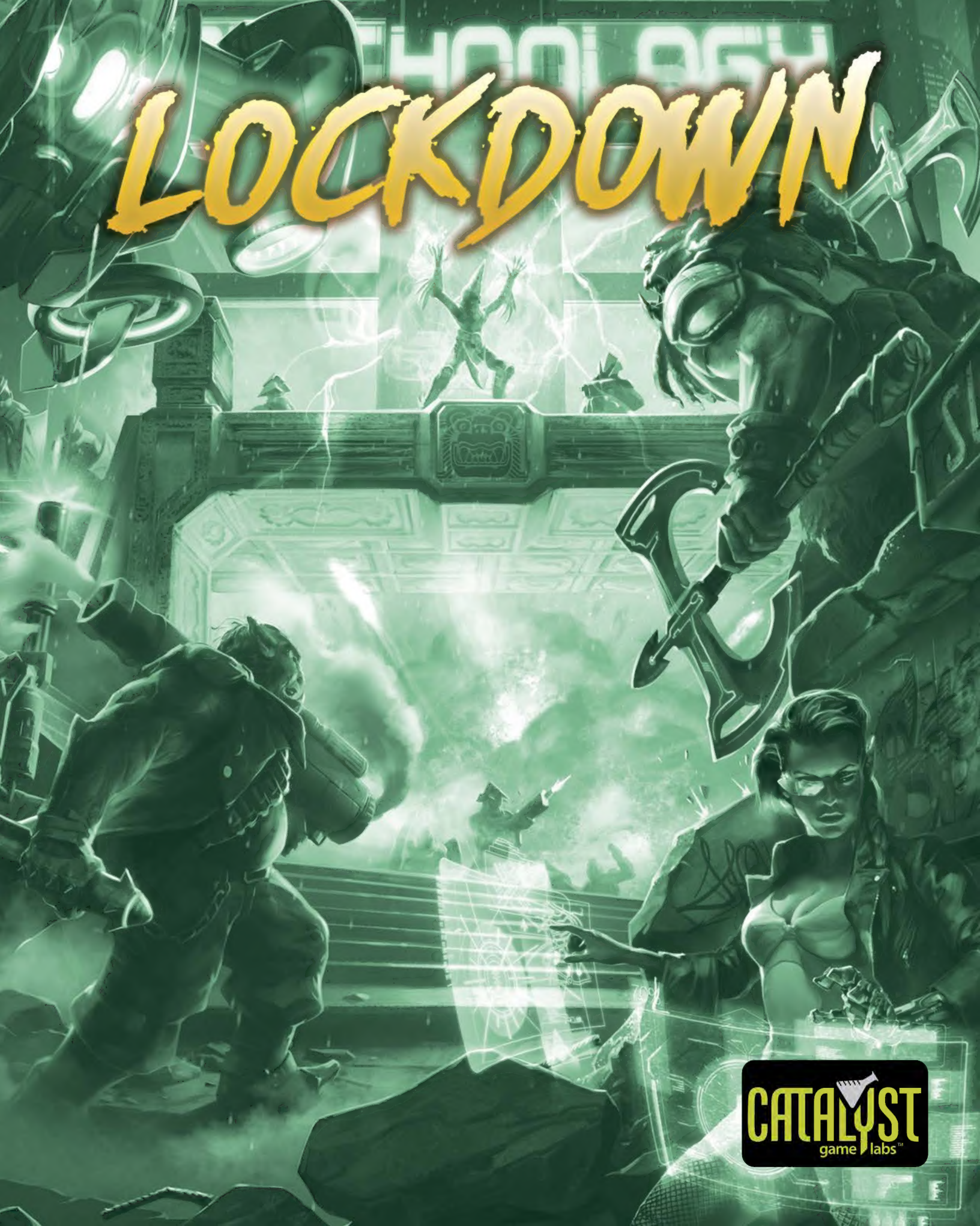
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JACKPOINT

CONNECTING TO JACKPOINT VPN...
...IDENTITY SPOOFED
...ENCRYPTION KEYS GENERATED
...CONNECTED TO ONION ROUTERS

>>>LOGIN: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
>>>ENTER PASSCODE: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
...BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED
YOU'RE IN. USE IT WELL.

"WE ARE FUGITIVES OF THE LAW. IDIOCY IS OUR ONLY OPTION." -SAM DANIELS

JACKPOINT STATS

Interaction rate: –3%
Posts per hour: –1%
Today's content quality (signal:noise): 2:5

LATEST NEWS

- <090376> I've seen the bug reports. I know what you all are speculating. We're just going to call it the "FJ" bug for now, because I can't stop you all from calling it that. But that doesn't mean I think there is a connection. –Glitch

PERSONAL ALERTS

- You have 3 new private messages.
- Your internal Q score is 58 (up 2 points)
- You have 14 new responses to your JackPoint posts.
- You have 2 new friend requests; 2 friends have dropped you.
- PDA: NeoNET is reporting earnings to shareholders in twenty days. Contact any fixers with NeoNET ties now.
- PDA: Your Doc Wagon contract has been expired for 5 days. Either renew it now or be really, really careful

THE INNER CIRCLE

You are visible to your closest 4 levels of contacts.
Your Eyes Only posts have been viewed 8 times
Current Time: September 3, 2076, 11:42

WELCOME BACK TO JACKPOINT, OMAE:

Your last connection was severed: 10 hours, 24 minutes, 18 seconds ago.

TODAY'S HEADS UP

- If you're not turning over last stone to get an advantage over everyone else, you might as well start picking out your epitaph. [Tag: Run Faster]

* Magic, money, and machines flow fast through the Sioux Nation. Try to keep up. [Tag: Shadows in Focus: Sioux Nation]

INCOMING

- When corps get desperate, we get paid. Or killed. Or both. [Tag: Bloody Business]
- When you're feeling bad about yourself, remember: There are at least ten people worse than you. [Tag: 10 Terrorists]

TOP NEWS ITEMS

- Miles Lanier's name removed from all NeoNET corporate materials. No statement forthcoming from corporate spokespeople. Link
- Aztechnology says shift of significant personnel and equipment to Antarctica is "purely exploratory." Link
- Kenneth Brackhaven's rant about the media at latest press conference has been designated as the "Limp-Dicked Bloodsuckers" Speech in news sites and forums across the world. Link

INTRODUCTION

Civilization in the best of situations hangs by a thin thread, and it's never the best of situations in the Sixth World. In *Lockdown*, one of the great cities of North America, Boston, disintegrates into chaos, and shadowrunners have a chance to be on the frontline, reaping profit from the disaster and playing a role in determining who will come out on top of this mess—and who will take the fall.

A dragon crashing into the Green Monster at Fenway. Strange iridescent rain falling on people across the city and leaving them changed forever. People demonstrating behaviors they had never shown and knowledge they never possessed. And megacorporations scrambling desperately to uncover each other's secrets—or to bury those secrets so deep no one can ever find them. And in the middle of it all, millions of innocent people struggle to survive a nightmare, or get themselves out of the sprawl.

That and more waits for *Shadowrun* players. *Lockdown* represents a new level of collaboration between the tabletop role-playing game and an electronic *Shadowrun* game. The gameplay of *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* is closely tied to the plot elements described here, meaning this book can provide adventure background and plotlines for tabletop players while also giving more details and setting information for people playing the computer game. Art from *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* is also included in this book (along with art made especially for this book), giving readers a look into the concepts shaping that game.

So to get you ready for the high-stakes adventure and crossover fun, here's what you can find in this book:

- **The Hub of the Universe:** Details on the city of Boston as it was in the Sixth World before the lockdown kicked in, so runners have a baseline from which to start their adventures.
- **Lockdown Timeline:** A look at the events of the crisis affecting Boston as they unfolded.
- **Locking the Hub:** Information on how the lockdown was accomplished, what corporate activities might have contributed to the current situation, and what notable people were unable to get out when the quarantine came—or came to the sprawl because of the chaos.
- **Behind the Curtain:** Shows how Boston has changed as it adjusts to the lockdown, providing setting details and adventure hooks for characters as they wander the Quarantine Zone.
- **Beantown Bound, Trainyard Troubles, Digging Deeper, and Bringing Down the House:** These four chapters outline adventures for characters to become involved in the lockdown plotline, from their initial arrival in the sprawl to the search for the biggest secrets in the city.
- **Game Information and Character Trove:** All the game stats and rules players and gamemasters need to run in Boston during the lockdown and deal with the myriad threats waiting for them.

And of course there are short fiction pieces to set the mood and show players just how bad things have gotten in Boston.

An important part of this book is the way it will shape the Sixth World going forward. Players of *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* will have the opportunity to share the results of their gameplay to shape the world, and tabletop players have the same opportunity. The forums at www.shadowrun.com/forums/categories/gameworld will provide opportunities for players to share the results of their games, which will result in a major shakeup of the corporate powers going forward.

So to sum up: A breakdown of civilization, new threats, crazy danger, corporate desperation, and secrets so big they'll change the shape of the Sixth World. That's what's waiting for you in this book.

Turn the page when you're ready.

HARBOR HEIST

"Paimon, cut the power!" Brutus yelled as if the volume of his voice mattered with the subvocal microphone glued to his neck. The big ork was angry—it was the third time he'd given that command in the last ten seconds.

A.J. knew there must have been some kind of trouble. Ten seconds was an eternity in the Matrix. Paimon could have turned the power on and off fifty times in that period, if the decker wasn't occupied with something else. He knew the team didn't have much more time to wait. Skipping straight to plan C, he activated his wires and hopped from the small Nightrunner he was sharing with Brutus, moving onto the sloped stern of the big Blohm and Voss Sigma.

The Sigma was a beautiful yacht. One hundred nineteen meters of excessive opulence anchored in Boston Harbor, waiting for its owner, Angelina Melnichenko, to complete her business ashore and cruise on back to the Caribbean League. A.J. was well aware of the owner, and even more aware of the timeline the team was on to get in, get the statue that Melnichenko was currently negotiating the sale of (quite possibly to his employer), and get off the boat without anyone being the wiser.

If Paimon was dealing with enough issues in the Matrix to slow him down, then plan A was already hosed. Plan B wasn't A.J.'s style; quitting never got you paid. So plan C it was. And plan C was simple.

Wing it.

Quietly quick-stepping up the steep stern, A.J. cleared the rim and dropped into the narrow gap of cover provided by the hot tub. He had spotted two guards. One was on the upper balcony, facing into the cabin. The second was seated only three meters away on the opposite side of the hot tub. A.J. could hear the music playing through the nearer guard's earbuds even without activating the features in his cyberears.

A.J. stayed low and glided around the rim of the hot tub. He drew his Colt as he moved along the edge of the oval ring. His smartlink told him the Colt Government 2066 was fully loaded, currently using gel rounds, safety off, and silencer engaged. Rounding the corner down low he got a clean line on the guard and started to raise up the pistol.

"A.J., what the frag are you doing?" Brutus was now yelling at him. A.J. was surprised it took the ork so long to notice he was gone.

'Trying to get us paid. Stop yelling in my head, please," A.J. replied mentally. His headware commlink took his thoughts and sent them along as audio without him ever making a sound. It had taken a while to get used to that. At first he would talk and send the messages. Early on, when he had a microtranciever and the same subvocal setup as Brutus, everyone got his internal and external voices at the same time. It was A.J. in stereo.

"Last I checked we contracted you to negotiate with the Johnson, not for your combat prowess." A.J. could tell Brutus was genuinely pissed by the tone of his voice, but like any good negotiator, he also knew it was easier to bend the will of the angry. As long as you knew the right buttons to push.

"I've got a line on two guards. I can drop one but I'll need

BY SCOTT SCHLETZ

help with the other. That'd be half the ship's complement down and out, nobody the wiser." A.J. used a nice soothing mental tone while preying on Brutus' love of being needed.

"Paimon hasn't cut the power yet. We can't go. Stand down."

"We'll have two down when Paimon finally gets the juice cut. He's got to be having problems of his own. They might be warned before we get another easy chance, and if we find the target's hacker we can pull the plug and free up Paimon."

A.J. waited for what felt like an eternity. He was close enough that he could make out the bass line of the music playing through the guards earbuds—it was Wrecking Ball by Grudge. He wasn't a huge fan of troll-rock but it had caught on in the pop scene thanks to its catchy bass line.

"I've got the balcony lined up," Brutus said quietly this time, obviously subvocalizing. "We gonna do this?"

A.J. peeked his head up high enough to see over the hot tub and spotted signs of Brutus lying prone on the steep slope of the stern. The thick silencer barrel of his bullpup H&K and flat black metal fingers clutching the small rail were all A.J. could see. It was enough.

"Call it." A.J. gave control of the shot to Brutus for two reasons. One, to feed the ork's ego; and two, he wanted the ork as backup on his shot, just in case. He had all the 'wares for doing a little muscle work, but he was still a talker at heart. He slipped back around the edge and started to line the shot up.

"On zero. Two, one."

Zero was never spoken. It was marked by paired chuffs as both guns fired near simultaneously. A.J. had lined up the shot for maximum benefit, and the guard's head whipped sideways as the gel-like bullet flattened against his temple into a three-centimeter-wide blue pancake. There was a risk of serious damage but little risk of staying conscious after a hit like that.

"Clear," Brutus said, slightly louder and clearer this time. With a grunt, the big ork pulled himself off the slope with only one arm and joined A.J. on the deck.

The pair didn't speak. Brutus took two zip-tie manacles and bound the unconscious guard's hands and feet. A.J. kept his eyes on the door to the main cabin as well as the narrow walkway around the outside edge of the boat. When Brutus was done, he signaled A.J. to follow him with a simple hand wave. A.J. smiled and laughed a little as he thought about all the trid shows that made shadowrunners out to be these special ops, hand-signal-using, professional killing machines. He wished.

Brutus took the lead and slipped up to the main cabin door. He wanted the power to be out so he would have the advantage in case there was anyone on the other side of the door, but Paimon hadn't managed to turn it off yet. That made Brutus nervous. Paimon wasn't the best decker in the business, but he should have been able to access the boat's devices without a problem. It was something he'd have to worry about more when things got rougher.

When he looked back to check on his colleague, Brutus was impressed by the face's positioning. A.J. had a nice solid single knee stance and was aiming his customized Colt straight at the doorway. The face's head was still moving slightly from side to side as he kept an eye out but as soon as Brutus caught his eye with another hand wave, A.J. locked his eyes on the door and activated the thermal sensing hardware in his eye suite.

As Brutus pulled the door open, A.J. immediately reacted to someone sitting on the bulky couch in the center of the cabin. A warm blob of a head poked up above the couch. It was another risky shot, but he took it anyway. The head jerked forward and the target flopped with barely a sound onto the ground.

Brutus moved in quickly and scanned around the room without any vision systems engaged. It was the perfect picture of luxury. Real leather couch, real wood trim, gold inlays on everything, and an entertainment suite that wouldn't fit in his apartment filled the first cabin. And it was one of four main cabins, plus there were six double cabins, two master cabins, four quad-sleeper crew cabins, two single-sleeper captain's cabins, two galleys, a dining hall, two separate engine rooms, a generator, and storage lockers with enough supplies to keep the ship at sea for three months. Not to mention the "garages" that housed the ship's two Blohm & Voss Waveskippers, six jet skis, and the emergency boats.

A.J. moved in quickly behind the ork and deactivated the thermo hardware. As he looked around the room he gave out a low whistle, which got Brutus quickly spinning on him with a big metal finger up to his thick orkish lips. A.J. chortled at the sight, but he quickly quashed his inadvertent smile and gave Brutus a thumbs up and apologetic expression.

When the pair rounded the couch, they saw A.J.'s handiwork sprawled out on thick plush carpeting. He almost looked like he was sleeping comfortably except for the plug pushing into his head and lifting it to an odd angle. Brutus checked to make sure the hacker was alive—God knows they could be frail little things—and when he found his pulse he clapped the zip-cuffs on him and pulled the datacord from his head.

"Got him. Killing the pow—" Paimon's voice came through tinny and metallic over the Matrix.

"Cancel the power loss. Get us cameras. We need to know where the other two guards are," Brutus commanded. "We've handled the two out back."

The pair waited only a second before the camera feeds appeared through the image link in their cybereyes. That was how fast they were used to Paimon working. One guard was still outside, standing near the helipad on the foredeck. The second was in the master bedroom standing in a corner with a good line on the door but out of sight if it opened.

"Scan for any more and warn us if any other vessels approach," Brutus subvocalized as he started moving for the stairs to the lower cabin.

The pair moved quickly and quietly down and then forward toward the master bedroom. Their intel said the statue would be in the safe hidden beneath the waterbed in the master bedroom. That was likely why there was a guard stationed there inside the room and not in the hallway or even up in the cabin.

From the view of the camera, Brutus was sure the SMG the guard was holding wasn't silenced. The angle he had on the door meant he would be able to get a shot off before the pair could get into the room, and that meant warning the guard on the deck and possibly waking the guard he had dropped up on the balcony. He didn't want to be fighting his way up, so they needed a plan to get the guard to move.

Brutus stopped to look over the camera image more closely. It took a few seconds but he spotted something and Brutus had an idea. "Paimon, does the waterbed in the master have an autofill feature?"

"Checking ...," Paimon replied. Then, after a short pause: "Yes. Yes it does."

"Overfill it on my mark. Let A.J. and I get in place first." Brutus continued moving.

The two waited outside the master bedroom door, a gold and redwood work of art. Brutus gave the order to Paimon and the pair watched their video feed as the bed swelled. The guard noticed and moved around the bed to the control panel on the opposite side of the bed, exactly where Brutus expected him to go. A.J. opened the door this time, smoothly turning the handle to avoid alerting the guard as he watched the confused thug try to get the bed to stop filling.

Brutus waited for just enough space before he fired the first time. The round hit at the point where the spine goes into the skull and slammed the big man's head forward into the bed control panel. His knees started to buckle but then caught, and he started to spin.

Brutus was ready with another shot, and A.J. brought the Colt up to bear as well. Both men fired and rocked the guard again. The two shots hit close together on the side of the burly human's ribs. The twin impacts knocked the wind from his lungs, and his knees buckled again. The guard fell forward onto the swollen waterbed. His mass added the last bit of pressure it could take, and the valve ruptured. Water sprayed up directly at the door and drenched the two shadowrunners, catching them by surprise.

"Kill the overfill. Kill it now!" Brutus spat the words, and the water, from his mouth.

The water stopped gushing from the valve but continued to flow from the overfull mattress, puddling on the floor of the bedroom. A.J. shook some water from his hair, then ran his fingers through it to push it back into place as he crouched low and splashed through the puddle looking for the hidden safe.

He rapped on the boards, looking for a change in sound. When he finally found it, he stood straight and looked puzzled.

"Safe's here, but I have no idea how to get to it," he said. "The side looks like one solid board. Paimon, any thoughts?"

'Brutus, what's your side look like?' Paimon asked.

"Three drawers, reddish wood, gold handles," the ork replied.

"I saw that over there too. No drawers on this side," A.J. added.

"Panel probably moves. Can you give it a little push, Brutus, see if it gives in some direction?" the hacker asked.

Brutus took a knee at the side of the bed. He dug his big metal fingers into the wood as he pulled the side panel in various directions. It had no give. "This far and we're jammed up by a hidden door. This is fraggin' ridiculous," the big ork muttered. Then, for good measure, he kicked the panel.

The bottom of the panel gave a little, slipping along the ground. Brutus ducked down again and pushed on the panel this time. The top held firm but the bottom swung back and up. Suddenly, the whole panel dropped into the floor revealing two drawers like the ones on the other side, along with a safe.

"Must have been shielded. I've got an icon for the safe now," Paimon said gleefully.

Now they just had to crack it.

A.J. stared at the safe as if his will alone would make it open. When the light on the front went green he felt like that kid at the stop light that waves his hand at just the right time to believe he changed the light. It was fun to think for a moment.

"Good to go," Paimon said in his tinny tone. "What's the exit strategy?"

"We weren't clean. Need a cover up. A.J., grab the statue and close the safe. Paimon, relock the safe, activate the cleaner drones for this water and fill the bed back up, then open the docks on the ship, lower the WaveSkippers, and fire them up. After you get all that done, fry the logs, then out." Brutus spoke in an authoritative clip, then turned to A.J. "You, head to the front and KO the guard, then get to the WaveSkipper and head for shore. I'm gonna scuttle the Zodiac, set up our fall guy, and follow in Skipper two."

"On it," A.J. replied mentally, because he had already grabbed the statue and was on his way down the hall.

A.J. made a u-turn and took the front stairs. He kept an eye on the camera feed in the corner of his vision to make sure the guard wasn't looking, then slowly rose up to get a good shot. The guard was staring off in the distance with a pair of electronic binoculars. A.J. followed the goon's gaze briefly and saw the running lights of an aircraft approaching the ship at low altitude. When he looked back, the guard had turned toward him and was starting to walk his way.

A.J. fired as he sent a message. *<Incoming!>*

The shot hit center mass, but gel rounds are known to be notoriously underpowered against body armor. The hit knocked the goon flat but he wasn't out by a long shot. A.J. had to duck back into the stairwell to avoid the blind spray of bullets the guard's SMG spat at him. The roar of the gunfire seemed muffled by the empty night air as A.J. tried to wait and listen for his moment. Autofire switched to short bursts as the shots moved lower and started to hit some of the finely crafted interior of the stairwell. A.J. had his sound filter set for one specific noise and hoped the shots wouldn't get down to the stairs he was laying against before he heard it.

Then it came. The clicking ping of the action locking on an empty mag.

A.J. rushed up the steps and found the goon only two meters out. He started firing quickly. Minimal aim, maximum rounds down range. The effect worked as the first two caught center mass again and knocked the guard to the deck. He didn't stop, though. He kept firing at the guard until the prone form stopped trying to stand up.

"How far out?" Brutus' voice came into A.J.'s head along with a little grunt.

'Klick and a half, closing fast. I think they saw my gunfight." It was just a guess—the real distance was "closer than I'm comfortable with," but A.J. didn't think he could get away with that description.

"WaveSkippers are ready," Paimon chimed in.

"Get to the boats. No lights, head for rendezvous point T," Brutus ordered.

A.J. wasn't about to argue. He ran for the aft starboard side of the boat and smoothly leapt over the side and down into the WaveSkipper.

"Starboard boat's mine. Take the clean side when you're ready." A.J. sent as he pulled the wheel hard to the right and jammed down the throttle. The small speedboat spun away from the massive yacht, and A.J. started toward rendezvous T, also known as Thompson Island, farther out in the harbor.

A.J. made a quick glance back at the other WaveSkipper and saw Brutus laying on what looked like a body out over the deck of the garage on the Sigma. Probably part of the cover plan. He made a mental note to ask later. As his gaze turned back he saw a flash of orange coming from downtown. His first thought was that it was a missile launch from the aircraft coming in, but the flash was farther back, maybe as far as the Hub itself.

A.J. made a quick check to make sure there were no buoys or obstructions in his way and then looked back in the direction of the flash. He stared at the bright lights of downtown Boston, the Hub, and let the image magnification systems in his eyes zoom in. He stopped on the aircraft first. It was an Osprey or similar model VTOL rotorcraft, the kind commonly used to ferry the rich and powerful around. It hadn't changed headings to veer toward him, so that was a good sign.

A few degrees left and another 10x magnification gave him a solid view of the downtown skyline. He scanned for the source of the flash, but nothing seemed immediately apparent. He was about to turn back when he saw the dark shadow pass between the tall towers trailing some kind of glistening rain like an old cropduster from the twentieth century. He predicted its path and zoomed in closer between the next two buildings while activating the recording feature in his eyeware. As it shot past he almost couldn't believe his eyes, but his stare was unwavering as he watched in horror-filled curiosity.

In fact, he didn't fully believe his eyes until he ran the playback when he reached Thompson Island, this time for the whole team.

"That's a dragon all right," Brutus said matter of factly. "I admit it—I didn't believe you at first."

"I'd say it's an adult western. It's not a great, and its coloration isn't in any of the databases," Paimon added in a tone similar to the one he used to discuss last night's urban brawl scores. 'It made plenty of news. Seems an iridescent dragon did a doozy on NeoNET Tower 4 and then crashed into Fenway during the Sox-Tigers game. It crushed the Green Monster. Game called on the count of rain ... ing dragons." The decker laughed heartily. No one else did.

"We'll doss down here for the night. Paimon, did you scrub the ownership on the boats?" Brutus asked.

"Do you see Harbor Patrol or Madam M's goons on your hoop?' the decker' snippy tone slipped through on that one. He didn't like being questioned about knowing his job.

"Fair enough. Contact the Johnson. Tell him we have the package and we'll deliver tomorrow as promised."

'I'll get on it right after I go out and collect a sample of the sparkling rain that fell off that dragon. Could be money in that." Paimon sounded almost gleeful at the prospect.

"Nice. If it turns out to be dragon piss, that's all you, Paimon," A.J. added with a laugh.

Later, as A.J. lay on his bedroll trying to drift off to sleep he looked back toward the glowing lights of the Hub and beyond. He could still see some patches of air glistening to the west of Downtown as if the rain floated on the wind or the clouds. And the thin darker patch of the sky that was the column of smoke rising from the battered NeoNET Tower 4. Whatever the rain was, it wasn't dragon piss, and it was more than likely bad news for Beantown.

Before finally settling in, A.J. booked a flight to Seattle for early Saturday morning. Best to get out while the getting was good.

A RUNNER'S GUIDE TO BOSTON

BOSTON: HISTORY ABOUNDS

POSTED BY: SOUTHIE

PAST

So they asked me if I'd give a little history on Boston. I politely reminded them of my opinions on history from the Damon file, and they said that's exactly why they asked me. No long-winded babble on settlers and city expansion, just enough highlights to set things up, and then on to the nit and grit of day-to-day Boston.

One thing before I start, for anyone wondering what I'm doing outside the Quarantine Zone: work. I was on the outside when the cordon went up. But I have friends on the inside. Lots of friends. I'm as eager as anyone to know what's up and what I can do about it.

So here goes, pals.

Boston is one of the oldest cities on the eastern seaboard. Been around since the 1600s. Fast forward four hundred years or so (told ya I'd be brief). Every city needs its niche, that thing that makes it different, its reason to be there. When that niche goes away, all ya can do is wait for the next whatever to come along and hope tourism keeps ya afloat 'til it does. Boston started out as a harbor and fishing town—whaling too, which isn't fishing but is close enough. Did a star turn in early American politics, then pretty much retired—one giant historical landmark relying on tourism. Until the late 1900s, that is. That's when tourism started to fade, the pleasant folk stopped coming, and the slums started to greatly resemble downtown. And vice versa.

Then came the quake. It shook New York and woke Boston up. The city jumped at a chance to become the new home of the East Coast Stock Exchange (ECSE). The stock moguls came to town, and Boston swept the dirt out (where it settled in Roxbury!). Money started flowing in, putting Boston on the map again. Like any growing city it started absorbing all the smaller cities, towns, villages, hamlets, neighborhoods, and unincorporated areas foolish enough to get too close. Before long you had yourself the Northeastern Metroplex Axis (NEMA). Boston absorbed almost everything inside the I-95 loop on the south and up to around Malden north of the Hub. A few spots stayed independent, like them smartfrag Cambridge snobs, and a lot of the neighborhood folks still refuse to call themselves Bostonians or NEMAns (like this Southie tusker), but it's all still part of the Axis and Boston.

So the city grows, draws in megatons of money and power, and becomes a primary target for Winternight when they went all Ragnarok on the world in '64. A Matrix nightmare at the ECSE for Novatech's IPO (I actually don't know that that means) spread around the world, followed by an EMP that trashed the power grid and electronic infrastructure. Pretty much knocked the Nub down to the level of the Rox.

We made it through, but it hasn't been the same since. The ECSE moved back to New York—fraggin' MDC and their rebuilding efforts. But a lot of companies liked working out of Boston; they'd wrangled pretty firm control of Beantown—and with the new Matrix so easy to get around in, there was no reason for most of the moneymen to move. We kept our corporate overseers and just moved on.

In recent years, the city has recovered from Winternight's attacks and put a lid on the old ECSE; kept whatever trouble might be lurking there under wraps. I kept asking myself why they didn't just wipe everything. You know me—silly tusker thinks he knows better than the megacorps. Bit them in the ass, though, didn't it?

And that pretty much gets us to today.

PRESENT

Boston was one of the first cities to get the new Grid system. NeoNET and MCT had an unprecedented fit of intermegacorporate cooperation (is it just me, or has that gotten eerily common since this latest Matrix update?); they developed the new system in record time and had it up and running April of '75. Outside of the test cities like Bogotá, Boston was the first city to go totally new Grid. Yeah, I know others started playing with what it could do earlier, but Boston was the first to go all in. I'm not sure what good it's doing the folks on the inside now, but it gave me a few pretty amazing months of not getting my 'link hacked by every MIT&T freshman looking to walk on the wild side. I know there

are some pretty wiz new decks out there that can shred my poor 'link in a blink, but it's not like before.

- Yet!
- Slamm-0!

Having this new grid meant less hackerfests, more B&E gigs, and a drastic uptick in operations against NeoNET and MCT here in Boston looking for base code to use in those new decks. Not your everyday gigs, but it came to mind and you all should know what the runner scene looked like before the quarantine. It helps give you some idea of what's possible by way of resources and/or allies in the QZ. The skillsets are there for some interesting ops. On the same note the number of new "deckers" in town was also higher than you might find elsewhere. These codewizards aren't the script-kiddies of the hacker generation—they are skilled pros. Hah, that slang makes me almost sound like I have a clue. I don't, but that's why I respect my tech guys.

The everyday in Boston is pretty simple. Every morning the Downtown fills with commuters, mostly from the greater metro area but a good number from as far away as New York and Maine. Downtown buzzes all day every day and usually into the late night. The Downtown crowd starts thinning around 1800 hours, but the local population doesn't get down to official census levels until 2200 at least—or early the next morning on game days. The T is a 24/7 operation so people are always able to catch a train out or into town. It was business as usual the day the cordon went up, so you know the population density inside the QZ is way above normal. Speaking of the T, that could be next.

BOSTON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

A key part of Boston's evolution has always been moving things in, out, and through the city. Boston had a great public transit system connecting the whole region, not just local. The MBTA, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority—"T" to locals—can get you pretty much anywhere in the Metroplex in relative safety. The only major exception—and it is major—is the Rox. No one is safe there. The T operates all the major rail lines, subways, and bus routes in the city and surrounding area. This means they coordinate everything to operate with maximum efficiency. I'm not saying this because of all the stock I own in MBTA, which I really don't, or because I like braggin' on Boston, I'm saying it because someone got it right and made sure to set up schedules that made for smooth travel pretty much anywhere you're going.

The T operates the high-speed rails that ran commuters to Boston from down in Rhode Island and up to southern Maine, there're even New York and Bangor runs. But the high-speeds still take almost two hours, which means it's easier to get there on the Grid. The trains rock along at over 240 kph so no old cowboy-movie plays here without a nice copter. And that sort of thing is batshit crazy, even to a Southie.

Sticking to the topic of trains, we can discuss the subways. All routes lead to the Hub. Outstations for the different lines are all over the Boston 'plex. Most of them are still inside the QZ, but a few of the stops are outside. From what I've heard those are locked down tight.

Before the QZ, the trains ran smooth and round the clock, had solid security, contracted through Minuteman, and made life pretty easy for commuters and tourists. Stations are well guarded at all times, but security is more lax in the tunnels. I've had Johnsons hold meets in secluded alcoves off the main line, and the tunnels're where you'll find some of the best access points for the Catacombs. More on all that in my View From the Ground Up section. At one point in history, not sure when, some of the subway rails were above ground. Don't ask me, I don't get it either. But now, the majority of the rail lines run below ground and have all sorts of little substations and pull off tunnels to play in.

- Actually, most mass transit rail systems have aboveground, underground, and elevated sections. Boston's T was much the same at one point. Guess the corps found it easier to stick the commuters underground and move them around. Hate for them to see daylight and know what they're missing.
- Traveler Jones

An often-overlooked but important part of Boston's public transportation is the ferry system. Ferries criss-

cross the harbor, with some routes going up the rivers farther than you might think. Major routes run down to Quincy, up to Nahant and Marblehead, and over to most of the islands in the harbor. They have three types: vehicle ferries, people ferries, and high-speed ferries. The vehicle ferries are like long barges with a small passenger area, loaded using the GridGuide system to maximize efficiency. People ferries are usually triple-deckers, can fit about 1,500 people, and are run by HarborGuide. The high-speed ferries run to Manhattan (3.5 hours), Cape Cod (45 minutes), Portland (1.5 hours), Saint John (4 hours), Yarmouth (3 hours), and Halifax (4.5 hours), with passenger berths ranging from 1,250 on the longer runs to 1,500 on the shorter routes. These craft aren't built for luxury, but they provide a nice, undisturbed ride, and every type of ferry has several private areas—or areas that can be made private—for long meetings.

The last, and probably biggest, part of the T in Boston is the buses. Running off the most updated GridGuide system in the world (some good things come from getting EMP'd), the bus fleet for the MBTA is ninety-nine percent automated, but every bus still has a driver to provide a metahuman backup and friendly face (ha!) for the riders. The one percent that are not automated operate routes that go through rough neighborhoods, and the driver really only drives the bus when it's in areas where GridGuide can't seem to stay functional. Buses are a cheap and easy way to get around Boston. They are also the transportation mode of choice for fans of my next topic, sports.

BOSTON SPORTS

The people of Boston take their sports seriously, and have since the dawn of the 20th century—when the Red Sox played their first game. Sports are a part of, if not the heart of, Boston year round. Whether it's celebrating a win, lamenting a loss, rehashing last season, or speculating on next season—anywhere, anytime, you can make a friend in Boston by talking sports. As long as it's Boston sports. No one cares what you have to say about any other teams, unless you're saying how much they suck. Saying that about any Boston team, especially if they do, is the quickest way to start a brawl.

TEAMS AND TROUBLES

BRUINS (ICE HOCKEY, NHL)

They lost their stadium and some players, as well as most of their front office staff. The owner, Stacey Van Peursem, will be activating absentee clauses for players or staff who don't make practices to cut payroll. His quick fix is hiring players on the cheap; we'll see how that works out. A lot of money has already been lost, and the season hasn't gotten rolling.

RED SOX (BASEBALL, NABL)

The biggest hurt of all came here. The stadium, and famous Green Monster, was trashed, and then the team lost every player to a plane crash. The front office lost a few to the quarantine, but they've managed to limp along since. Expect a few rebuilding years here and a big push to clear the quarantine so they can get in and get Fenway back in action. Also expect lots of tributes to the fallen.

CELTICS (BASKETBALL, NBA)

Like the Bruins, they lost the Garden and a few key players, as well as the majority of their front office. They also lost their owner, Martin Villiers. No surprise they haven't accomplished much since. They'll start their season short players and little or no practice behind them. Even negotiations for places to practice have not been going well. Expect very little from the Celtics this season.

MASSACRE (URBAN BRAWL, NAUBL)

I imagine Wild Billy Chis, Janis "Cypher" Landgrebe, James "Buster" Herbert, and Scott "Jellyfish" Kelly are inside ruling the roost of a few square block area in the Rox, practicing for when they are let out and can get back in the league. Most of the front office is outside the QZ and working to get a team together for the season while also trying to find a new "home field" since the Rox and South Boston zones are both inside the QZ. Sadly, the entire team is inside the QZ.

REVOLUTION (FOOTBALL (SOCCER), MLS)

A few players were lost inside, but the team office is down near Foxboro stadium. They should be able to kick on and stay competitive. Or at least as competitive as they've ever been. They'll have poor fan turnout, which was already pretty low, and could possibly fold after this season even if the QZ opens.

CANNONS (STICKBALL, A-NE-JO-DI LEAGUE)

Most people will have no idea who this is, but I happen to enjoy lacrosse, or stickball, or A-ne-jo-di as the NANners call it. The Cannons are down about half the team and have lost Harvard Field, their home field. They still have their front office and will continue to play. Big news was Horizon stepping in with some sponsorship to keep them playing.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (AMERICAN FOOTBALL, NFL)

Six players is a big chunk to lose, but they'll play on. Their front office is completely intact, and they still have a stadium. In fact, the stadium is already running sales on tickets to get people in and even planning pre-game ten-nuyen tickets to fill the season-ticket-holder spots for those inside the QZ. A number of those tickets are the private skyboxes, so expect a crowd to snag those premier pre-game tickets.

I won't run down how the teams are doing. Well, not much. The Red Sox lost their whole roster in the plane crash, of course. The Celtics and Bruins had to scramble to find places to play, what with the Garden being inside the QZ. Some of their players are inside, too. The Celtics' star center, Chay D. Hart, is the big name; other names to know are the Bruins' second line center, Julien Pirou, and Hans "OverRun" Heintz, first line defenseman. Their seasons are gonna be tough, but they'll lay plenty of people out on the ice.

The Patriots and the Revolution caught one break—they play at Foxboro Stadium, outside the zone. But both teams lost parts of the starting lineups inside the QZ—six for the Patriots and two from the Revolution. Of course, the biggest threat to all these teams' survival is the fact a huge chunk of their fan base is trapped inside the QZ. Not to be cold about it, but professional teams are businesses that depend on money-spending fans. I'll link up a full list of the big attractions in sports around Boston and note how they might be affected by the quarantine.

Second to sports, the thing folks in Boston love most is music. And with Boston's diverse population groups—every one of them proud of their roots—the music scene is culturally dynamic. Cry No Tírs is an Irish anarchy sensation out of South Boston, big with humans—Irish or not. Trog rock in various flavors is big with trolls and orks, and the elves have their Sperethiel synthcore. Deep rock, which gets its unique sound from being recorded deep underground, has really caught on with the dwarfs. Everyone has their preferences, of course, but everyone is proud of how they influence each other, giving all the music a distinct Boston sound.

There were several recording artists—including rising audio artiste Walter Machado—Downtown when the quarantine went up. Like I said, it was a business-as-usual day. No one's heard anything from any of them—a lot of top-nuyen talent wasting away on the inside. Though for all we know they could all be working on new albums as we read this. Hometown boys, Thrashing Angels, the nu-thrash chart toppers, are hosting a series of benefit

concerts at Foxboro Stadium. Proceeds go to research on a cure for the encephalitis virus. So far they've lined up neo-classical superstars Bach's Back, raw metal rock gods Iron Ore, and powernoize sensations Bringin' da Noize. The after-party will be hosted by D.J. Tubbster as he remixes the music recorded at the show.

I hope this little trip down memory lane gives all of you an idea what we've lost here—and maybe some thoughts on what might be going down if you happen to slip inside. Boston is a tough town. It'll take more than this—whatever "this" looks like inside the QZ—to take us out.

- Southie, no plans to slip in and check on home?
- /dev/grrl

- Honestly, I tried. Didn't make it. Haven't been up for trying again since that trip cost me a foot.
- Southie

- Damn. Okay. Sorry to hear that.
- /dev/grrl

- Looking for someone to get you in?
- Southie

- More to get the scoop on the 'rents. They were at the Towers. Sure they're fine.
- /dev/grrl

- Sorry to hear that. If you can get me a private convo with Kane I may be able to work something out.
- Southie

- You got it, Southie. Anything to get her to stop moping. For a rebellious young hacker who rags on her "'rents" as much as she does, she sure is moody since the QZ went silent. Just so you know, the answer is "No," but we can still talk.
- Kane

- @Kane: You're an ass. And thanks. @Southie: I'll PM you with some convincing arguments.
- /dev/grrl

BOSTON: FROM THE GROUND UP

POSTED BY: SOUTHIE

Sometimes it's a really good idea to know where you're working. Not just the people or the corps, but the actual location itself. A working knowledge of the lay of the land is important to everyone because you don't have your rigger with you every second of the day, and it's a lot safer to remember which streets run one-way into the bridges when it's time to get your hoop out of the Hub. Go ahead and study a mapsoft or ask GridGuide, but I'll bet I can get from the NeoNET Towers to Doc Wagon Mass Gen on foot faster than you can in your car using those. Just listen up and try to absorb a little of what I say.

- I take offense to that. My rigger drives me everywhere! Seriously, this is true. Boston is an old town, and the Hub had no problem completely removing streets to build the megacorporate towers that now create its skyline. What they didn't do, unfortunately, was widen the rest of the streets. A lot of one-ways, narrow two-ways, and even dead-ends make getting anywhere a challenge. Obey your GridGuide or learn the layout. Anything else will get you in more trouble than you want.
- Turbo Bunny

Before I get too far let me point out some basic facts and pull in some regional data that was meaningful up until last month. It's actually still useful in that it gives you an idea how many angry and frightened people you're likely to meet inside the quarantine zone.

I'll run this down from the center out. The NEMA is bigger than just the Boston Metroplex, but Boston is by far the most populous chunk of the greater entity. The Hub, short for Hub of the Universe (don't ask me why, go look it up yourself), also known as Downtown Boston, or the Nub if you're a Southie, is what most people think of when you say Boston. Especially after the megacorps decided they all needed to demonstrate their superiority with architectural monstrosities. In addition to towers that look like giant you-know-whats erected by the smaller players, four major structures give Boston its iconic skyline.

The NeoNET Towers (previously the Novatech Towers, and before that, Fuchi Towers) are built out over Purchase and the highway, near Congress, in the southeast corner of the Nub. The complex has one huge pentagonal tower with five smaller pentagonal towers—one at each point. They're all connected by enclosed skywalks, but the bridges are staggered every two floors in the central tower and every ten floors in the outer buildings. The whole thing looks cool, but it's a slitch to navigate. Each tower offers a different amazing view of the city:

(NEMA) BOSTON AREA METROPOLITAN COMPLEX

Population: 4,934,728
Human: 58%
Elf: 13%
Dwarf: 7%
Ork: 15%
Troll: 6%
Other: 1%
Density: 407/km2
Per Capita Income: 42,000¥
Estimated SINless: ~1,100,000
Below Poverty Level: 9%
Education:
- **Less than 12 Years:** 12%
- **High School Equivalency:** 27%
- **College Equivalency:** 39%
- **Advanced Degrees or Certificates:** 22%

Corporate Affiliation: 68%
Hospitals: 56
Doc Wagon Clinics: 29

Means of Commuting to Work:
- **Internal Combustion Vehicle:** 2%
- **GridGuide/HarborGuide Electric Vehicle, Individual:** 10%
- **GridGuide/HarborGuide Electric Vehicle, Group:** 18%
- **"T" Riders:** 47%
- **On-site Workers:** 22%
- **Other:** 1%

Neighborhood Ratings:
- **AAA:** Back Bay, Beacon Hill
- **AA:** "Downtown"
- **A:** Cambridge, Chelsea, Revere
- **B:** Newton, Somerville
- **C:** South Boston
- **D:** Brookline
- **E:** Dedham
- **Z:** The Rox, The Catacombs

Felonious Crime Rate: (Violent) 2 per 1,000 per annum; (Non-violent) 14 per 1,000 per annum

Service Providers:
- **Fire Safety:** Boston Fire, Inc. (Martin Villiers)
- **GridGuide:** Renraku
- **HarborGuide:** Renraku
- **HealthCare:** Doc Wagon Medical Services
- **Matrix Service:** NeoNET
- **Police:** Knight Errant Security Services
- **Power:** Shiawase Energy
- **Prisons:** Lone Star Correctional Services
- **Public Works:** Boston City, Inc. (Martin Villiers)
- **Sanitation:** Boston City, Inc. (Martin Villiers)

- These stats include almost everyone inside the QZ. Add in another 250,000 for up near Salem and Peabody that aren't counted. What is not listed here are the numbers of commuters that are likely stuck in the city now. I never spent a lot of time down in the Nub so I'm not sure how the numbers climb. /dev/grrl, any guesses?
- Southie

- NeoNET tracked statistics for it broken down by commuting travel distance. If I add in all those outside the QZ distances and run it past a little density algorithm I get … Oh machina! The number jumps by 2.5 million! Bumps the regular population by fifty percent!!!
- /dev/grrl

- That makes a lot of sense. When they started working on the wall I was trying to figure out where they moved all the people in those houses. Most of them were probably empty.
- Pistons

- And if they weren't, they made them empty.
- Hard Exit

- Or bulldozed them with people inside. It's not completely unrealistic from what we know.
- Hannibelle

- The majority of the houses out that way were already empty. Have been for years, since most of the people moved toward downtown into all the new skyscrapers. Not saying the corps didn't bulldoze the squatters.
- Southie

- The walls wail with grief, feeding the darkness of the shroud.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Boston Harbor, MIT&T, and from the southeast corner of the southeast tower you can see clear to Fenway. This I know for a fact, because I stayed there once—part of a job—and watched a whole Sox game from the balcony with my scope (and was sorely tempted to wing Aligens to get him out of the game after Philly took him yard for the fourth time). Point is, the place is swank, and the towers are taller than every other structure in town except for one.

Mitsuhama Computer Technologies' Boston HQ won some architect a half dozen awards in the '40s. It consists of two tall, corkscrewing spires (they don't call them towers) connected by skywalks that twist around each other, making a double spiral. It's supposed to look like DNA, something called a double helix, but I earned my education in the alleys of South Boston, so DNA is not my forte. (Though I do know two liquids you can get it from for a Johnson to use for his nefarious purposes. Yes I know what nefarious means.) Me, I call it the twisted ladder to hell. I know the ladder was supposed to go to heaven, but it's my nickname and I'm sticking with it. Those helixing spires have a dozen or so meters on NeoNET's towers but they're at the opposite corner of the Nub, so from the water, NeoNET still looks bigger.

Ares does not plaster their name all over their holdings around Boston, but their subsidiaries control substantial chunks of real estate. To the untrained observer it looks like their only footprint is the Ares SkyTouch Tower—third tallest tower in town (say that ten times fast)—and the kind of architectural genius you would expect from a midwestern city. Story is it's supposed to be an homage to the Sears Tower in Chicago, but more than anything else the Ares SkyTouch Tower looks like a kid's building block creation. Ares operates their HQ out of SkyTouch, and Knight Errant has a corporate headquarters and a major downtown precinct in the building. The rest is rented out to other businesses—for the most part harmless and not directly connected to Ares. The space is pretty primo since KE is on your doorstep.

- OK, funny story: I did a simple B&E job against a certain firm that has offices in the SkyTouch. I was looking for a challenge worthy of my skills, and a building with a major security service precinct built in seemed right. I got in clean, got what I needed, and got the target out safely. It seemed too easy, and I was just way too curious to see what kind of response time they could manage on site, so I tripped a sensor, left a wireless camera behind to record the response, and then slipped out clean. When I eventually checked the footage, the response consisted of one rather obese guard, not even KE, coming up to look around and then radioing down to say false alarm. I was ashamed that I tried so hard.
- Mika

- Don't take that as chip truth for every alarm in SkyTouch. I've known at least two teams who made the wrong choice of going after a target in the building and ended up split between the holding cells and the morgue.
- Southie

The last easy identifier of downtown Boston from the harbor, and most anywhere with a sightline on the Nub, is Aztechnology's step-pyramid—their HQ is a giant ziggurat right on the water. It was built in the late '30s, before some of its towering companions, and it lacks that phallic vibe. Instead it sits like a sturdy block extending into the harbor from the waterfront. The outside of the building was built with a green marble. The parts along the water had been replaced with fresh marble several times over the years because of damage from the toxic harbor. Now the levels that contact the water have been replaced with more resistant synthetic materials. I remember when I was a kid hearing stories about the Vista Acuoso. It was a restaurant inside the pyramid with underwater views of the harbor. I know a lot of places have these, but this was in my town. Now there's nothing at all to see since the windows had to be replaced when they started to leak from corrosion. Moral of the story, I really wanted to see that, and that water really is nasty!

- That restaurant is now a secure research lab for analyzing the harbor. I'd say it's researching how to clean it up, but we all know better. That water eats through plasteel and marble—I'm sure the Azzies are trying to figure out a way to weaponize that.
- Pyramid Watcher

Before my mind wanders too far off of Downtown, which it's starting to, let me mention the airport. Logan International Airport, named for the X-Men's Wolverine (not true but I don't care to look up the real person), is located opposite the Nub across the harbor. It's easily accessed by the T, and there's a road through Callahan tunnel under the harbor. I mainly wanted to mention it because it is inside the QZ. Think about that.

Away from downtown and bad thoughts of airports in quarantine zones, we move out to the communities Boston absorbed. The Nub is one hundred percent developed—even the grassy Boston Commons isn't natural—but as the metroplex stretches beyond that, the natural lay of the land shapes the city. According to Aetherpedia, this area was shaped by glaciation—that means hills, valleys, lakes, ponds, creeks, and a few oddball surprises

were scraped out by the big sheet of ice that covered the place a long, long time ago. I said that to say that outside the Nub the streets and residential districts have odd layouts. For most of its history, construction around Boston followed the lay of the land, instead of changing it, and what it couldn't follow it went over or under.

As is the case in other metroplexes, residents and planners needed a way to discern one part of the city from another. Boston has a long and rich history of segregated neighborhoods, so breaking the larger area down wasn't easy. Boston used the smaller cities they had absorbed as boundaries for districts, each with a district representative on the Boston City Council. The districts further allowed different neighborhoods to select, however they chose, representatives to attend district meetings on major issues.

Now keep in mind many of the city's residents are corporate citizens and don't play a role in their local politics; some participate out of a matter of neighborhood pride, but they can't act as representatives on any level. Also, it's good for me to point out that the districts lack real boundary lines since they're based on former neighborhoods. In the past this has meant the neighborhoods change, complete with territorial disputes and even some brawls. Many of the average citizens of Boston have a gang mentality when it comes to their turf.

Though I'd love to talk about my own corner of South Boston, odds are most folks here care more about places like Roxbury, a.k.a. the Rox. Boston has a lot of neighborhoods with subpar security or spots where you can find a low-key doss to hide out—or about anything else you can think of—but nothing compares to the lawlessness and roach-infested drek-holes of the Rox.

Boston's ascent was Rox's descent. Rox is where Boston dumped all the dirt and scum to make room for the shiny new towers and fancy-suited business folks. If you've been to Seattle, it's like Redmond, or the Aurora Warrens in Denver. The difference here though is that it's Boston, and Boston is well...just different. An important thing to remember everywhere in Boston is the value of two things, ethnicity and history. Downtown may be full of international folks and people speaking every language of the globe, but Boston's neighborhoods are broken down by ancestries that only Bostonians truly understand; don't bother if you're an outsider. Boston was built on unified separation. Irish stuck with Irish, Italians stuck with Italians, and so forth, but Boston stuck with Boston. I might be born and raised a Southie squarehead ork but you can sure as hell bet any Rox Mick is gonna stand by my side when some Chicago migrant starts getting mouthy. Now me and Rox might get to blows after the Chi guy is out cold, but that's only cause I didn't really need his help. Yeah, it's happened before. The point: Neighborhoods all over Boston are real tight-knit and pretty homogenous, so remember to mind your manners. We don't like you, but we can be pretty cordial if you are polite.

Everything I just said doesn't apply—or applies differently—to the Catacombs. Your average Bostonian doesn't experience the Catacombs, but for shadowrunners the place is a mix of bolthole, shopping mall, hunting ground, secret passage, nightclub, meeting spot, storage locker, and so much more. Runners can do and find just about anything in the Catacombs. *If* they know where to look or who to ask. It's like a city under the city. No one I know has ever mapped this whole place—probably cause anyone who tried died when they hit a pack of ghouls or swarm of bug spirits or some worse things no one's ever classified that hide out down there. In one way this place is like any other in that it has its wilds, its suburbs, and its civilized areas. Of course keep in mind all those terms are still referring to a series of underground tunnels, caves, sewers, and basements. If you're new in town or headed down for the first time, get a guide. Taysacs, at The Tipsy Dragon in Roxbury, is one of my top picks, and he'll take anyone. A lot of others only work by referral, so get to know someone or get it set up through your fixer.

- Deep6, Sewer Rat, and Eddie Z all take newcomers too. They work out of Kung Lung, a restaurant about a block from the ChinatownT station. Which is a spot that happens to have good access to the Catacombs.
- Traveller Jones

- Can't state how important it is to follow Southie's advice. If you go without a guide, please just drop off all your expensive gear in a locker and give me the code. It won't save you down there, and will likely just end up littering some critters nest or as undigested lumps in a pile of their shit.
- Picador

- The Nub and Catacombs are home to a sweet little magic shop called "The Wandering Wizard." The place is run by Doc Belmont. He's got a rare setup that allows his shop access to both levels of the city. He's usually upstairs operating the regular store, but he'll slip down for special deals. If you have something you think is arcane in nature, bring it by—he'll tell you what it does for a moderate fee.
- Winterhawk

- No discussion of the Catacombs can be complete without the Busted Bunker. Originally a fallout shelter built a century ago, the place was discovered and repurposed as a nice little bar. For the right price, BakaGrappler can get you some authentic mid-1900's food that was in the shelter. It's pricey, but something fun to say you've had.
- /dev/grrl

Since I mentioned the highs and the lows, I might as well mention the snobbish. Two of the most prestigious

universities in the world are located "within" the Boston Metroplex. Now, I put those quotes up because for some reason, Cambridge, home to both MIT&T and Harvard, likes to make sure that everyone knows they may be part of the Metroplex government, but they are not part of Boston. I'm sure there're tons of long dissertations or studies somewhere about why they're better off independent, but everyone knows it's just pure ego. Cambridge wants to stay Cambridge. The Cambridge District of Boston or the NEMA or anything else just won't do.

What do you need to know about Cambridge? For starters, if you are working in Boston you will end up there at some point. MIT&T is on the cutting edge of more fields with almost unpronounceable names than I can count, and Harvard medical is not far behind. Jobs to steal data and samples from those campuses occur just about every week. The colleges don't want to appear like armed camps they would need to be to stop these jobs, so every lick of their real security is designed to blend into the background. Those handsome gentlemen in the nice uniforms that say "Campus Security" walking around aren't security, they're PR. They're there to make the kiddies feel comfortable and direct them to their next class. The closest they get to real security work is breaking up rowdy frat parties on Greek row. This is just a little primer, so I'm not going into great detail here; just be well aware the colleges are full of high-ticket brainiacs and serious hidden security.

- MIT&T and Harvard like to hire security that looks young and blends into the college crowd. Best way to spot their real security is to run facial recognition software in the quad linked to a data log. The faces that never seem to go to a class are the ones that belong to security.
- Hard Exit

- What about the kids that just ditch class?
- /dev/grrl

- This isn't Boston College were talking about, it's MIT&T and Harvard. Ditch a class and you might as well drop out. This is the big-brain leagues.
- Beaker

- Any word on The Professor? I know it's a common street name, but I'm referring to the former shadow operator who taught at U-W and now sunlights as a prof at MIT&T. He popped over to Boston for the fall of '71 semester after some trouble in Seattle in late '70. He's likely a hot commodity with his specialty in spell design and a need for some new tricks if people want deal with CFD or get word through the quarantine.
- Arete

- I wonder how The Shady Heart has fared. It's a top-notch nightspot where the smart would rub elbows with the smart and rebellious. Many a wild idea was birthed in the smoke and haze of that spot.
- Winterhawk

Boston is famous as a tech town, and that tech has made Route 128 famous with its massive concentration of tech research labs, tech development companies, and tech production facilities. Before I get too far I'll remind non-locals that what I, and the rest of Boston, call Route 128, you will see as I-95 on a map. Call it 128 or the tech corridor because nothing shuts a local up faster than some "outie" saying I-95 or even 95. Sorry, tangented again. 128 is a prime target for runners. The security is always pretty solid and you are likely in extraterritorial space, so beware. Do your homework about the spot you are hitting and anywhere you might pass through going in or out. Not many things will scrag your run faster than ducking KE by slipping onto megacorp territory only for it to be MCT and you're in the zero-zone. Speaking of MCT, 128 is also full of arcane research outfits and has lots of astral and dual-natured security, including paracritters at certain sites.

Moving outward we find the mix of urban, suburban, rural, and wild all within the friendly confines of the 128 ring. The urban sprawl stretches out along the coast, up the rivers, and along the interstates, though most of the living space along 128 is at the corp labs. The neighborhoods along those areas are built up and represent the height, or should I say heights, of modern urban expansion. Most of the structures are multistory with the occasional exception of the historic landmarks that dot the area. Even some of those are inside the towers that were built around them. They're pretty interesting if you're some NeoNET corpkid who goes there on field trips, but for me they're just old buildings that I might have seen driving by on runs.

- Speaking as such a NeoNET corpkid, the historical sites are prime spots for quiet meetings. There are a few security drones, easily looped by a good hacker, but very little other surveillance. Johnsons in Boston will often use these places as meet spots, but remember it is still a public place, and there are almost always corpkids there on field trips. The little ones are perceptive, nosy as shit, and loud-mouthed. They spot a gun or even obvious cyber, the class is abuzz, the teacher knows, and then security knows. Play it cool.
- /dev/grrl

The urban heights fade down pretty quickly into the maddening maze of curving streets in the former suburbia. There are trees galore, almost like Boston's using the suburbs to make up for all the trees they tore down to build the rest of the place. From above the streets look

like rivers in a forest. The trees are often so dense and tall you can't even see the homes below. The shopping areas are patches of concrete and many of those have planted rows of trees to shade the parking lots.

These suburban stretches roll between the neighborhoods of Lexington and Woburn and down toward Belmont and Waltham. Very few of the former suburbs are still suburban; many areas and subdivisions are blighted areas abandoned during bad economic times or because of viral plagues or the Crash of '64. These areas are often squatter havens, dosses for runners with a contact in the realty biz, gang hangouts, or worse. I've seen the worse. They hide behind the fences that once kept the rabble out but now keep the rabble separated from each other. I've tracked down quite a few teenage corpkids who'd run away from mommy and daddy at the corp housing by the river to go back home, only to find home filled with gangers, squatters, whores, or even ghouls. Funny thing is only twenty-five meters away is a perfectly groomed lawn with a white-picket fence that belongs to the Joneses inside Cottage House Glen, the perfect suburban family, separated by an electric fence hidden by the overgrowth and ever-present trees.

- Southie's right on with these spots. A lot of the population moved into the arcs and towers downtown. There are quite a few ghost towns out here. Be wary, though. Some of those ghost towns belong to megacorps that bought out the land to move their people downtown. That means extraterritoriality and freedom to do as they please.
- Snopes

On the south side of the river and over I-90, surrounding the urban garbage dump, literally and figuratively, that is the Rox, we have the Newtons (-ville, West, Highlands, Lower Falls, and Upper Falls) to the west, Dedham and 95 to the south, and over to Milton, Mattapan, I-93 and South Boston in the east. These areas are more suburban confusion with a touch more consistency in their collapse. The Rox is like a blight on the land that is slowly expanding. The closer the suburb is to the Rox, the more likely it is to now be a collapsing hellhole where runners hide out, "outside" the Rox.

South Boston deserves special mention, and not just because it's my hometown. It's one of the few places along the coast and close to downtown that managed to fight off the corporate high-rises, literally. Every time the corporations came in to buy up a shop, it was a brawl. All the damage took its toll on the area, and though the locals have tried to work together to rebuild, the corps have taken a few shots in return for all the trouble. The end result is one of the top five urban brawl zones in the world. There are worse things to be famous for.

- Right on the edge of the brawl is a club called The Black Death. They host a live band during every match. The wall behind the stage was replaced with bullet-proof glass, and the action often plays out as a backdrop to the latest up-and-comer on the death metal, thrash metal, or trog rock scene. Between matches they host signings with players and have regular shows, but the big names come out on game day.
- Slamm-0!

Something everyone has come to respect in the Northeast is Mother Nature. Even before the Awakening, this part of the world knew the wrath of Mother Nature. Winter storms have buried the city of Boston in over a meter of snow in a single storm, and over three meters between melts. That, along with subzero cold snaps over a month long, means that this place knows the lady well.

With the Awakening, the strong connection to nature magic in this region and the economic realities—not to mention survival realities—driving former suburbanites into the cities, Mother Nature has reclaimed whole swaths of the Northeast region. A few small patches of suburbia still cling to the areas around the Fells (Middlesex Fells to outsiders) and Lynn Woods, but the UCAS Federal land reservations are now overgrown. Along with a lot of territory north of the city. Oh, you'll still find suburban enclaves somehow surviving within the NEMA, but the metroplex has had little luck keeping nature in check. Those who live south of Peabody and Salem and north of the city stick to the cleared roads when not holed up inside their homes or walled communities; those who live longest avoid excursions into the forests. The locals refer to these areas as the Wilds.

Nature controls the Wilds, no question, but man presses close on every side. That means in addition to a widespread and diverse population of paracritters, there's an unhealthy number of mutations that either formed there or escaped to there or were dumped there. Not to mention corporate experiments—either escaped, dumped, or released for study in their "natural" environment. It's a dangerous place to wander. There are hundreds of legends and rumors about what's in the Wilds—with new ones cropping up every day. Things coming through astral portals or Awakened creatures wreaking vengeance on those who have wronged the land, or harmed a golden-hearted witch, or some other transgression only the Wilds understand. Pretty much they all boil down to beware the dark places, because the magic is strong out here. I don't know enough about what can or can't happen in the Wilds to discount any legend, rumor, or cautionary tale, so I'd proceed as though every one is based on true events. Better wary than buried.

- There's some money in hunting in this region, but it isn't easy. The minute you step off the road you have to remember you've just entered the food chain. You may think you're the predator but there are plenty of local fauna, and some flora, that will teach you differently. Do your research, keep out a wary eye, get in and, most importantly, get out quick. A day trip that turns into an overnight usually ends with being digested.
- Sticks

- The Wilds are a prime spot to grab telesma. But keep with Sticks' advice and try to keep the trips short. A number of the critters out in those parts are naturally attracted to the best telesma gathering spots and defend their territory with the ferocity of a mama piasma defending her cubs.
- Arete

When considering the interesting areas around Boston, you have to remember the many peninsulas. Several exclusive and reclusive populations have staked out these narrow strips of dirt. These peninsulas are where you will find the private enclaves of megacorporate executives, rich (a.k.a. dirty) politicians, and celebrities from a dozen fields. The limited access allows security to be cheap and tight all at the same time. Any invasions from the water are easily thwarted by alert and eager boat patrols and/or private security on the million-nuyen yachts floating all around the little land fingers. If I were inside, this would be where I'd go.

So that's the dirt on Boston in a nutshell. She's got her highs and lows and not a whole lot of in the middle. Gotta love her.

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

Boston and politics. You can't have one without the other. Boston has a long, rich political history. Originally the center for trade in goods and information for the early European settlers, it grew to be the largest center of commerce in Great Britain's colonial empire, before maturing to become a hub of economic and political influence, first in the United States and now the UCAS. The city's political clout has led to some turbulent times. Populist protest, American revolutionary war battles, political assassinations (literal and figurative), the yoyo-ing ECSE, and covert struggles for control of its influence over economic and cultural forces in New England are all part of that political history of Boston. But none of us is here for the history. I just wanted to present the richness and depth of Boston's political heritage to throw today's political puppetry into stark contrast.

Like many major cities throughout the world, Boston has so much political and cultural history that the megacorporations are cautious in how or even if they display their true power. This isn't fear on their part; it's taking care to use what's probably the most powerful means of social control available to them. They want UCAS citizens believing they have some influence on their world and that their government is actually in control. This strategy makes the politics of Boston quite a rich field. Of course we all know the truth—that the megacorporations have all the power that matters—but as long as the politicians believe what they do matters, they fight for the change they think they can make. And throw a lot of work our way in the process.

- Megacorporations are tricky like that.
- Slamm-0!

There are some changes in the air. Year before last Boston lost a mayor (see the *Dirty Tricks* posting for more details) and gained a darling, Meghan O'Rylan. The deputy mayor turned interim mayor turned elected mayor enjoys an almost celebrity status. Her connections to Damon and to hard-nosed, hands-dirty politics along with her Boston beauty, girl-next-door looks keep her on the trid pretty much 24/7. Since many of her detractors felt she walked into her mayoral position thanks to the death of the former mayor, and Garrett Seaver's hard-fought campaign that ended in scandal, Mayor Meghan (as her followers call her) has pushed hard to make some changes in Boston. She's increased KE patrols around the Rox to curtail seepage, added extra video surveillance to the T system for increased safety, trimmed fat from the city government and redirected funds that freed up to education programs that seem to actually be doing what they say they do, and been pushing MCT to do something with the old ECSE.

Trimming that fat was a boon for runners. What got cut were patronage positions and sinecures handed out by corrupt city councilors and previous administrations. Rerouting that gravy train meant a lot of former moochers who've spent years lounging around the corridors of government are now looking to leverage the dirt they collected during those years into a new place of power—or at least income—without getting their hands dirty. The fat-trimming program is ongoing, so we can expect the work to be steady. Expect an upturn when these trimmed individuals consolidate enough power to take a chance going after some revenge on Mayor O'Rylan.

- Wonder what the quarantine's going to do with this. I know what these dirtbags do behind close doors—I can only imagine what they will do behind a massive curtain. It's going to be ugly in there.
- Picador

- Any word on O'Rylan? I saw that news blip before the full media blackout, and it sounded like she was staying inside.
- Netcat

- Crazy slitch stayed in far as I can tell. Only in Boston!
- Kane

- Damn straight. And don't you forget it!
- /dev/grrl

- Case in point.
- Kane

The ECSE is a touchier topic. MCT picked up the property for a song after the Crash and, according to the public, hasn't done much with it but leave the lights on and keep the squatters out. Truth is they are running research programs out of the place and they don't want to do anything with it. O'Rylan is butting heads with the wrong mega here.

- Nothing on her and Damon. Kay, what's that about?
- Kane

- I have nothing concrete and therefore won't speculate.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Damon's too wild to settle as a mayoral match. They "dated" for a few months and have stayed friends since. Since then she hasn't been focusing her city safety campaign on BADs, so I'd speculate he still has some influence over her.
- Southie

Glitch said this should be a quick primer, so other than the mayor's office there are just three other main political points I want to mention. Those are: the presence of a very large pool of support for the New Revolution, the New Century headquarters that sits over by MIT&T, and the political maneuvers of suspected Human Nation member and UCAS Representative, Trevor Simms.

- Thanks for listening Kay. It's good to know someone does.
- Glitch

- I listen. I just don't obey.
- Slamm-0!

The New Revolution is a group we are not unfamiliar with. Their goal is to reunify the Americas and take back the land that the old U.S. of A. claimed during its heyday. Boston is considered the Cradle of Liberty by these new revolutionaries, imbued with an almost mythic gravitas. Not quite holy ground, but close. For us this means a lot of runs to spy on these guys, provide discreet security for private meetings, run blackmail operations, perform acts of terrorism in the name of the New Revolution (you know who you are), and any other dirty little task that needs deniability and discretion. Just remember when you take work for these gentlemen you are committing an act of high treason and can be put to death. Make sure to establish your own plausible deniability and have a good way out of town ready in case you're compromised. Also remember, the New Revolution harasses all the North Am nations—any one of them will extradite New Revolution sympathizers and/or operatives without hesitation. So make sure your exit route puts you in the Carib League or northern NAN or points even farther away.

- That note about treason is serious, but in our line of work we are more likely to be reinvested than executed. Our unique skillsets make us useful to the government, and our existing ties to a terrorist organization make us a great asset to turn and put back in the fold.
- Goat Foot

- Problem with Goat Foot's statement, especially here, is that the New Revolution aren't stupid, and they are very well connected. Word would likely travel back to the cell with which you are trying to re-connect that you're a Benedict Arnold. You'd be walking into an execution.
- Kay St. Irregular

- He's right, but the government guys who are willing to turn you loose are also usually willing to use that skillset, especially the violent parts of it, and have no hesitation in ordering you to return so they can try to kill your handlers. It's a twisted little game that is best to avoid. Either pass on the gig or do it right the first time.
- Thorn

The New Century headquarters is a bustling office between the MIT&T and Harvard campuses where the politicians have access to a lot of desperate and Awakened collegians who want to change the world by reshaping it in the image of Magocracy. That's not their official organizational objective, but it captures the fundamental mindset of every kid who wants to work for New Century. Which makes the New Century headquarters a great recruiting pool for the Illuminates of the New Dawn, since they are the backbone of the New Centurists. What makes that background information valuable to us is IOND's little shadow war against the Black Lodge is directed from New Century's HQ. Of course our intel on the Black Lodge is sparse, beyond the fact that a few known members, at least known to us, still sit in DeeCee. Well, the IOND and the Black Lodge are archenemies for life, and this is where most jobs against the Black Lodge

originate. It's a quiet shadow war, running behind the scenes, which makes it typical of running in Boston. Disruptive runs in Boston are very deliberately pitched to send a message. Try to remember that so you don't end up sending the wrong message.

- These messages can make or break a runner team in the eyes of the local fixers and Johnsons. If you killed a guard at the MCT facility when you could have just knocked him out, it sends a message to MCT that you are out for blood. And in most cases you aren't just representing yourself. You just sent a message to Mitsuhama that the Johnson who hired you, and whoever is behind that Johnson, is out for blood. This is a quick way to lose friends.
- Fianchetto

- Permanently. Boston's shadows are quiet and "bush-league" to the unaware out-of-towner, but they are far more unforgiving than a big metroplex like Seattle where you can just crawl back into the cesspool. Mistakes in Boston are forgiven by God.
- Thorn

- Not quite, Thorn. The saying goes, "Mistakes in Boston are forgiven. Mistakes in South Boston are only forgiven by God."
- Southie

- Spoken like a true mistake of Southie.
- Thorn

- Funny coming from a shidhe. Guess this place really has slipped since 'Jack left. Thought more of you, Thorn.
- Southie

- Glitch, would you mind deleting my last comment. I apologize, Southie. Too much time playing the part of Boston upper crust combined with getting more practice using trodes is making for some problems. I think I'll go back to typing these kinds of responses, allows more time to generate my own thoughts.
- Thorn

- No. But this isn't South Boston. So you're forgiven.
- Glitch

- Apology accepted, Thorn. I honestly thought we were about to start 'scatching and I was wondering when you were gonna hit Artie's for a drink.
- Southie

- 'scatching?
- Slamm-0!

- Hop to Beantown and find out for yourself, Harvard.
- /dev/grrl

- :)
- Southie

Speaking of dirty secret societies, let's move over to UCAS Representative Trevor Simms—representative of genocidal megalomaniacs, to be specific. Simms is a suspected member of the Human Nation mentioned in the *Conspiracy Theories* data drop, and as such I took an interest in him. Not that I take everything from CT as chip truth, but certain bits piqued my interest. Simms has spent a lot of time in and around Boston campaigning for the development and expansion of programs intended to ease the burden of the impoverished. He campaigns in DeeCee for funding to be directed to his state. Funding to help improve living conditions in impoverished areas of the Boston Metroplex while working to minimize potential overpopulation among the destitute and SINless. Can anyone read that and not hear "sterilize the poor"? Apparently enough people don't, because he keeps getting re-elected. There is work for us on both sides of this coin. We can make money off Simms' dark side and help push the racist agenda of the Human Nation, or we can find those who oppose him and work to minimize his success and possibly reveal him for the racist murdering dirtbag that he is.

- Speak your mind Kay!
- Glitch

- I did. I have little else to say other than I am happy to say that Simms has not been seen since the quarantine and is listed as one of those inside. Since the registration listings aren't going public for those inside, all we have is speculation. He could have died in a crash or decided to bolt for the Carib League when the curtain fell.
- Kay St. Irregular

I could really talk for hours on politics in Boston and not even scratch the surface. This piece is a grain of sand in the vastness of the Sahara. Let me just remind all who do work in the shadows of Boston to keep what you find nice and hidden. Boston does not like the grey; they either shine the light and purge the darkness, or they char it black and force it into the abyss. You don't really want either alternative, so make sure as few people as possible know what you're up to so you can prevent those kinds of over-reactions. Running in Boston is a lot like working politics in DeeCee. You know how you want to do it, you know how it should be, would be, done anywhere else, but suck it up and do it the Boston way. Because when you buck this system, the system bucks back. Hard.

- Not sure why Seaver got glossed over so much, but I'm sure it's because Kay doesn't live in Beantown, doesn't follow the losers, and is above spreading scandalous rumors. I am not, though, so here goes. Seaver, though suspected of being involved in the former mayor's death, lost the mayoral election over a sex scandal instead of murder allegations. After the election everything quieted down for a few weeks, and then Seaver was back after the mayor, trying to get her to dig deeper into the mayor's death. He wanted everyone to know he didn't do it. Mayor Meghan called for the case to be reopened, assigned one of Boston's best detectives, Daniel "D.J." McCarthy, to the case, and figured things would settle down because it looked like something was being done. McCarthy is relentless and followed the trail of breadcrumbs right back to Seaver. This is how political runs in Boston work. Even when the cops go looking, the trail points to who Mr. Johnson wanted blamed.
- Southie

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

POSTED BY: ICARUS

We all know who I work for, and we all know who really runs Boston, so who better to discuss the corporate situation in Boston than yours truly. Let me start by simply saying that Boston is a well-hidden company town. The corps here do an amazing job of making the place feel like it's still the liberty-filled Boston of old. But believe me, those thoughts are as orchestrated and corporate brainwashing induced as your last trip to the Stuffer Shack for a can of 'Splode!

The Big Ten are all here, though it's hard to see Horizon, and Saeder-Krupp likes to hide behind their Siemens subsidiary. Quite a few AAs made sure to have offices in Boston while the ECSE was still here and just haven't gotten around to leaving. I'm kidding. Actually, Boston is still quite a lively megacorporate battlefield. Maybe even more so now than when the ECSE was here to make sure the kid gloves stayed on.

Bull asked for this update on Beantown, and I've had the same problem I have every time someone asks me to put together something like this—how do I keep from turning this into a doctoral dissertation? My answer today is to deliver minimal historical data and limit my updates to a maximum of two major points for each of the Big Ten and no more than 10 AAs make the list. Take it or leave it, it's all I'm giving you. So let's get started with the biggest dog in town.

NEONET

I'm placing this first but I am writing this last. NeoNET is my corp. I don't own enough shares to make the board, but I do get to send in votes on silly minor things and even throw some into the pot to decide who will run the show. I always vote for myself in hopes of some fluke or upper-level arguments making it happen. You will all know when it does.

Here in Boston, NeoNET runs the megacorporate show. Yes, if they all decided to work together the other corps could oust them with sheer megacorporate dirty trickery—but outside of the new grids and a hatred for hackers, that level of cooperation is not likely. So NeoNET stays number one in Boston. But what are they up to? A better question would be what aren't they up to? But that's too silly to answer.

I promised a limit of two major points for each of the Big Ten, but for NeoNET I'm amending it to mean two points from each faction of NeoNET, since they stage runs against each other as often as they run against other corps. As the primary force behind the creation of NeoNET, the biggest shareholder, and a Boston native, we can all blame Richard Villiers for NeoNET settling in Boston. All together, everyone: "Thanks Dick!" Now seriously, he is the poster boy for success in Boston and a physical embodiment of the Boston spirit of perseverance. He has been in the cockpit of two failed megacorporations already and keeps fighting his way back in. Here in Boston he mainly focuses on two areas, financial and Matrix development.

When the ECSE moved back to Manhattan, NeoNET financial brands didn't bother to follow. The Matrix lets them operate from Boston—which was a benefit when things in Manhattan got hot a few times last year. While the folks down there were worried about local troubles, the NeoNET brands were safe at home and focused on keeping Boston strong and stable. It's been a good year for JRJ Industries, Commonwealth Enterprises, and Silveril Investments, which of course means all of them have been targets for datasteals looking to snag intel on investment portfolios, market analyses, and cash flow. This is likely to continue for a while; the other firms know they can't match the financial finesse of Villiers and company, so they're reduced to finding ways to keep from being left too far behind.

As a primary creator of the new Matrix protocols, NeoNET was a big target in the early part of 2075—actually, the bull's eye has only gotten larger since the development of the new cyberdecks. Villiers has also been puppetmastering quite a few of the megacorporation's firms lately, a major change from his usual hands-off approach when it comes to day-to-day operations. His fingers in the mix mean both bigger paydays for success and harsher penalties for failure. Blow a job being backed by Villiers this close to home, and you might as well forget Mr. Johnson's number, along with that of your fixer. Conduct an operation that isn't Boston-style and you might be run out of town. Villiers likes the way his town runs, and he wants to keep it that way.

- It was worse back when Lanier was around to be his bulldog, but we can only guess how he turned out after his battle with CFD.
- /dev/grrl

- Funny you say that with what's coming later.
- Bull

- Later? Is the insider info from Lanier?
- /dev/grrl

- You skipped the Intro, didn't you? Oh, well. Lanier dropped us another line recently. It's later in the file.
- Bull

- Aren't you supposed to be fact checking?
- /dev/grrl

- Touché, but I'm waiting on some calls to be returned.
- Bull

Next up is Anders Malmstein's operational portfolio. Malmstein puts a lot of care into being a quiet force on the board of directors and in the company as a whole—competent, professional, removed from questionable practices, and with no agenda of his own—a persona perfect for Boston. His primary interest is undermining everything our European competitor, Saeder-Krupp, tries to accomplish. He battles against the many names of S-K by using their operations here to his advantage overseas. Data he gets from an S-K subsidiary on Boston soil can often be used to improve the market share of NeoNET over in Europe by threatening S-K operations there. That being said, I can't even really tell what Malmstein is up to, though I can tell you he spends very little time on this side of the pond.

It is strange to list a great dragon as the third tier of a corporate hierarchy, but that's the place Celedyr got when Villiers and Malmstein teamed up forming NeoNET. The dragon doesn't seem perturbed about the structure, or else he's playing the long game—something dragons do very well. Either way, he happily runs the megacorporation's R&D department—something else he does well. Villiers may be the face, but Celedyr is the mind. R&D is the bread and butter of NeoNET in Boston, and Celedyr has his talons in every aspect of it. He fills the arcane gap that all of Villiers' firms had before the merger with Transys-Erika. The 128 corridor and MIT&T are both dominated by NeoNET. They have the single largest number of facilities on the corridor and support the largest number of labs and staff at the university. Celedyr has even spoken there during one of his rare public moments.

The big deal earlier this year was the consolidation of some key projects from Caerleon and Albuquerque to their Boston HQ. There was a big hubbub about a major project going to a secure facility beneath tower four at the NeoNET Towers downtown. Since January there have been a lot of jobs looking to verify those rumors. Aztechnology is supposedly paying big money for info, but runners just aren't getting the paydata the Azzies are looking for.

- The data is getting snagged. The runners are just getting better offers before delivery. Usually the offer is, give it back or be a dragon snack.
- /dev/grrl

I'll make the rest quick. I don't know, nor am I willing to try to find out, the real owners of Trans-Latvian. Whatever they are up to in Boston is outside my lofty view, and I'm not willing to speculate for fear of being correct. Samantha has continued support of her ex but has been making waves lately. Her efforts here in Boston are fairly minimal as she keeps her focus on the Northwest Division. And as for Miles—well. We all know what was happening. Maybe someday we'll know how it turned out.

- Trans-Latvian has been the listed owner for a number of firms I've discovered are investing in some research at MIT&T inside labs funded by NeoNET. Not terribly surprising, but the same companies also have links to known members of Ordo Maximus. The dots connect, but no one is willing to draw the line.
- Winterhawk

- Soon there may be no line to draw. The OM has lost half a dozen prominent members this year and twice that number in '75. The deaths started in February of last year, shortly after DeVries got outed as a vamp. Two of the deceased failed their coverup attempts, and it was revealed they were HMHVV-positive. If they were behind outing him, it was probably the worst plan ever.
- Arete

- Exactly why they probably were not behind it, but someone may have painted that picture for DeVries. He's brilliant at times, but I've seen a pinpoint focus develop in him that could easily be exploited.
- Thorn

- I've caught rumors of DeVries operating in Boston. His style blends with the Euro feel, and his accent blends with the world culture they have going on there, so it's not a big stretch.
- /dev/grrl

- Now you're playing the "I saw DeVries game" too. Sad.
- Kane

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

It would be a disservice if I talked about MCT in Boston and didn't mention the former ECSE. Mitsuhama got their hands on the former ECSE building and all its contents shortly after the Crash and the stock exchange's move back to Manhattan. All the equipment stayed here, and new servers and mainframes were bought for New York. MCT owns everything that got left behind. Since then they have been keeping the place low-key. They have access to all that computing power a certain crazed AI sought to abuse but don't appear to be doing anything with it. But we all know how deceiving appearances can be.

My inside sources say they have a rather intense operation going on there, but they keep the whole thing looking abandoned to avoid inciting fear and/or inviting attention. According to my sources, the complex that MCT is apparently not using is in fact their technomancer research facility—and their research focuses heavily on Dissonance. They keep the place off the grid to avoid Matrix snooping, and they have the whole place coated in high-end wireless-negating paint. All their deliveries for supplies and subjects are made through mundane-looking services such as cleaners, utility services, and garbage pick up, all for the lone restaurant that operates out of the building. It keeps up the appearance of the place being minimally used, but it also makes working inside very isolated. From what I understand they also make extensive use of Mitsuhama's brand of rail-mounted drones hardwired for security. All of it screams massive wi-fi security.

- Isolated is good for us. When workers from these places get out, they are usually looking for a *really* good time and frequently say and do things that others in similar positions wouldn't. Like talk about when they start their next rotation so you know when another delivery is being made.
- Hard Exit

- That level of wireless security made the place stick out for years. Luckily the new Matrix protocols allow it to hide a little better. Coincidence?
- Bull

- As if anything with the new protocols is coincidence.
- Icarus

MCT doesn't have their usual big-city edge here in Boston, meaning the Yakuza. I'm not saying the Yaks aren't here, I'm just saying they are not a power player on the level of the Mafia and definitely don't give MCT the street-level resources they have in other big cities. This actually means more work for us, but that work is also the worst and most dangerous stuff the mega has to offer.

- How is that different than any other town?
- Mihoshi Oni

One of Mitsuhama's newest subsidiaries, CodeBlue Biotech, made headlines in Boston last summer when they rolled out a field test of their latest creations along the southern shores of the harbor. Algae and lichens that "eat" pollutants and digest the harmful materials into nutrients were delivered to several testing locations in the area and appear to be meeting test objectives, though the upbeat PR reports are light on specifics. This is only the third field trial of these organisms. The first, conducted off the polluted coasts of northern Europe, failed when the organisms were destroyed by unknown assailants. The second series of trials, held in the Glow City area of Redmond in the Seattle Metroplex, were reportedly successful but under such tight security no one could see for themselves. Here in Boston the security is just as tight, run by MCT's own house brand, Petrovski Security, but the shadows of Boston are designed for quiet runs like this datasteal would need to be.

The work of CodeBlue here is just one aspect of the new eco-friendly MCT that has been on the rise in the last few years. I'm surprised they have kept the image up this long, but I'm sure it has just meant more cover-up runs in the shadows so they can keep it plausible. They definitely have built the eco-friendly rep here in Boston, though it's usually countered by the creep-factor of their operations at the ECSE.

- MCT is definitely acting as the enforcer arm for the Japanese bloc here in Boston. Shiawase is all smiles and happy faces alongside Renraku, and MCT is the thug standing behind them keeping them from getting picked on. If the three can really team up and work together, NeoNET may have trouble in Boston.
- Mihoshi Oni

- This Japanese unity thing has definitely benefited the Japanacorps in highly contested markets all over the world. Instead of facing #'s 3, 5, and 8, it's like facing #1+. The three combined easily outmass S-K, and that's how they're playing things everywhere but the homeland these days.
- Kia

RENRAKU

I really like the new Renraku NorthAm. Their service industry focus over in Seattle is a breath of fresh air for a company that has been rocked by one scandal after another. Here in Boston that service focus has gotten them the city's HarborGuide contract and moving a boat in and out of the many docks and harbors around the area has never seemed easier, safer, or friendlier. I know that sounds like some kind of advertisement,

but it's true. Now I bet you all are wondering what this has to do with being a runner and corporate affairs in Boston. Everything.

A lot of transport goes on via the waterways around Boston, and the HarborGuide system Renraku operates extends twenty miles inland along every waterway big enough for a dugout and shipping lanes fifty miles out into the Atlantic. They guide traffic on the water just like GridGuide does on land with one exception. No one can operate outside their assigned HarborGuide route. Awesome for smooth-flowing water traffic, terrible to runners trying to run a stealth op from the water. There are free-drive zones in certain areas, and they have a buffer around them to keep boaters from drifting into HarborGuide shipping lanes. The system on every boat warns the pilot when they're leaving their safe path. At the same time it alerts an on-duty security rigger. Another warning comes a few seconds later, and if there haven't been any signs of compliance or a distress message, the security rigger makes two moves. First, they attempt to access to the ship's remote pilot (if it has one) and gain control of the boat to turn it around. If there is no remote system, they send an engine kill order through the HarborGuide system (a standard feature). If neither of those work, they scramble drones and Harbor Security to intercept. False alarms are amazing shows of their service aspect as they help out to fix whatever is wrong or offer to tow a disabled boat back to the harbor.

- It should be additionally noted that Harbor Security is fully staffed by Najima Security, a Renraku brand, and they operate some NICE boats provided at interdivisional rates from Harland & Wolf as well as Blohm & Voss.
- Icarus

No one should ever forget that Renraku is a computer company at its core, and their brand name is definitely rebuilding its reputation. Very few modern young consumers remember Renraku's loss of the Arcology in Seattle, and many who do think of it as a sad tale of government land-stealing (as Renraku has spun it in a number of recent documentaries). Here in Boston, with the 128 tech corridor full of prime minds and goodies, Renraku has been working to take a lot of peeks at other people's stuff in an especially quiet manner. The June release of Renraku's Arigato agent program, arguably the best on the market, came three days ahead of NeoNET's own Geeves program. It had all the same features and streamlines operations along with a few extra features. The reason for this is because it *is* NeoNET's Geeves program, but Renraku used their extra free time that they didn't spend developing the product working out some new features and adding them in once they had the base coding from NeoNET. I can point out probably half a dozen other products developed around Boston that Renraku has acquired, modified just enough to make it appear more advanced, and then released before the original developer was ready to launch. They're clean, quiet, and nearly undetectable because that's how Renraku wants to play in Boston.

- You get more flies with honey.
- Netcat

- For years Renraku has been distancing themselves from marketing anything involving AIs or advanced intelligence programming, but they've kept up in the field. The HarborGuide program is easily as advanced as the base coding that spawned Deus, but they have kept extra security precautions in place around it and operate with processor limits. The HarborGuide primary system has twenty-five SOTA mainframes and only operates in blocks of five with an hourly roll-up and shutdown of one mainframe. If someone were to crack their security and roll them all up at once ... well, let's say Deus might end up with a big brother.
- Icarus

- I'd be more worried about an AI that wants to upgrade looking to get into just those five, let alone looking to fire them all up.
- Netcat

- Fuck you all. I'm going to nuke HarborGuide now before I have nightmares for the rest of my life.
- Slamm-0!

- So what if this CFD thing got in there?
- Hard Exit

- Bad news, probably. CFD normally prefers a biological host but a pre-existing Intelligent Program, like the IC that place is crawling with, or possibly the HarborGuide program itself, could be infected. We still don't know for sure, though, so best to not take any work that might be testing that out.
- Butch

SHIAWASE

Oh, sweet Shiawase. They always seem so quiet and unassuming—they fit perfectly here in Boston. Knowing what they are doing—or even whether you are working for them—can be almost impossible. Shiawase divisions are all over Boston, many openly identified as such, but with a sizable percentage, ownership is not

readily apparent. Shiawase has every appearance of being an open and friendly corporation, with a public reputation to match. But we know the truth.

Here in Boston, Shiawase Biotech spends a good sum of their research and asset acquisition budgets grooming students from MIT&T and Harvard Medical to come work for them. A lot of that grooming is in the form of scholarships to cover those very expensive educations. Students repay their benefactors by conducting specifically requested research or gathering information about—spying on—the research of other students. Fake research papers are common on both campuses, created by students who know they're being spied on, even if they aren't sure by whom, and full of misinformation to be passed along to corporate handlers. It's like their own little spy games, and the MIFD gets a recruit or two every few terms. Their current focus is a cooperative effort between their Biotech and Media divisions to keep the Shiawase-brand genetech and nanoware free of the taint of CFD. Though the population at large does not know much about CFD, the corporations do; not as much as they'd like, but most have begun their own research into the phenomenon.

These guys may be number eight globally, but here in Boston they are second only to NeoNET in terms of real estate and diversity. With fingers in biofood, biotech, envirotech, media, omnicare, manufacturing, logistics, finance, and energy, they have assets all over the metroplex and are the de facto leader of the Japanese bloc. If NeoNET is king, Shiawase is a sly warlord subtly working to undermine the kingdom from within. Since I promised two areas for each corp, I'll focus on energy and biotech, with a slight violation of my policy to cover some omnicare since it links to their biotech.

Shiawase Energy, particularly their nuclear and green divisions, keeps the lights on in Boston. This gives them a lot of leverage, not only with the city but with some of their rival megas as well. They're not going to black out the town, but they've been known to strategically brown out areas to improve discretional asset success rates and the operations of their own Market Information & Forecasting Department, the elusive MIFD. This lofty status also means they are a frequent target of other operations looking to redirect or cut off power for their own purposes, so it's not all wine and roses. Their green division has double-stack turbines off the coast, harvesting wind energy above the surface and wave energy below. Some have charging stations, and the HarborGuide system directs boats in need of a recharge to the nearest station. Most can handle anything up to a hundred-meter yacht and a few have the oomph to handle a ship. Now why do I mention this? Because it makes a great place to grab a target if you can sabotage the batteries on their boat and get them to stop here. They have to power down all their main systems, including radar, and it takes about ten minutes to disengage the powering cables successfully.

- Just be careful that Shiawase doesn't have security on the station. When they do it's usually a sniper sitting way up high and dropping gravity assisted rounds down on your heads. Bullets do a lot of damage traveling down through the body.
- Mihoshi Oni

- The nuclear stations all have some pretty tight security too. You're better off looking at a transfer station if you want to tamper with the power flow.
- Hard Exit

Shiawase isn't just active out on 128 doing research on their biotech marvels. They're all over town putting these marvels into customers and test subjects looking to push the envelope on augmentation and advanced health care. That's why I wanted to tie in a little omnicare since they have subjects living in Shady Pines Retirement Homes and visiting the Reblossom Centres and Da Fang Rejuvenation Clinics. Some of the subjects don't even know they are test subjects. Whether due to Alzheimer's or just not reading the fine print, Shiawase has been able to turn the Boston Metroplex into their own private petri dish. The main thrust of their current research is finding a cure for Alzheimer's and related dementia-inducing disorders. The only specific I'm reasonably sure of is that one line of inquiry involves testing rejuvenation processes similar to Léonization.

- A friend of mine inside Shiawase has told me quite a few of the procedures they were using involved nanites and gene therapy, and that in the last year some of those procedures have been canceled. That has not been pretty for a few subjects.
- Beaker

S-K (VIA SIEMENS)

I know it's not done out of fear, but I still find it interesting that S-K barely puts their name on anything in Boston. We all know Boston is a NeoNET town, no one argues that, but for the number one megacorp on the planet to avoid displaying their brand in one of the world's largest metroplexes just seems odd.

- It's not odd. Most Boston residents won't buy something with an S-K logo, but very few are corporate savvy enough to know that money they direct at Siemens goes straight to the draconic megacorp.
- /dev/grrl

Even though S-K is not branded all over town, it doesn't mean Lofwyr isn't still milking this cash cow for all it's worth. Here in Boston S-K operates through subsidiaries, primarily Siemens but also through Ætherlink (Matrix), Amalgamated Technologies and Telecommunications (Matrix), American Broadcasting Service (media/trid broadcasting), AN Meridian (heavy industry), Angelic Entertainment (media/sim production), Arianespace (aerospace), Awakened World Research (magical research), Elementals' Service (magical services), Heavy Metal (heavy industry), Hermes Matrix Services (Matrix), Intel-XS (computech), Orbital Dynamix (aerospace/satellites), Spellweavers' Consortium (magical goods), and Vulcan Systems (miltech drones). They lean heavily toward American-sounding names for their operating fronts. If the S-K brand appears on anything, it is a very deliberate effort to push consumers to one of the megacorp's other brands.

So what are all these S-K subsidiaries up to here in Beantown? All sorts of things. Most are in direct competition with NeoNET subsidiaries or brands and runs between the parties involved are traded daily. Globally this last year has been pretty brutal for many of these firms, and especially here in Boston. While S-K and NeoNET have been trading runs, both megas have been getting blasted by assets from all the other dragons who have scores to settle with Lofwyr, Celedyr, or both. Their time for score-settling is running out, with the cut off in December, so expect things to get even hotter in the months to come.

An important focus for S-K in Boston is all things arcane. Three major subsidiaries in the area are actively recruiting—both among students at the universities and among the witches and warlocks up in Salem. Spell formulae design and reagent production and analysis is done at a number of smaller facilities up at the north end of the 128 corridor, closer to Salem. Runs done on these places are especially tricky since a high percentage of the staff is Awakened, and the companies that hire you to do the work are usually Awakened friendly. A lot of no-killing/collateral-damage rules get dropped on the teams that operate this circuit, and breaking those rules often gets you worse than blacklisted, especially by S-K Johnsons. Pretty much everyone in Boston understands the value and rarity of the Talent. They rarely use the Hans Brackhaus cover here, of course, since it's a dead giveaway, but sometimes other outfits try to use it to throw off suspicion. Beware any job that tries to play this card—it's a sure sign the Johnson is criminally stupid and doesn't know how things roll in Beantown.

- There has been a serious uptick in jobs that scream out "Geek the mage!" in the last month. I'm not quite sure why, but I have a feeling it's another wyrm's influence.
- Frosty

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

The all-American corp would seem like a good fit to compete with NeoNET in Boston, but they really aren't. Something about the East Coast dislike for anything not the East Coast makes folks shy away from the Midwest-based megacorporation. Now, on a global scale these may seem like minor issues, but on a local basis they mean everything. Americans have always been very America-centric, and just because they got drawn and quartered doesn't mean that view has changed. In fact, it has probably gotten worse for the remaining Americans. By that I mean those with UCAS and CAS citizenship, not megacorporate SINs. Folks inside the megas or who work for them tend to eat, sleep, and defecate corp-branded products. The only money that ever leaves the company usually slips out through rebellious teenagers trying to piss off their parents. Outside the company, the megacorporations have to advertise and target other citizens to get their nuyen.

Ares has had a rough shake of late. The Excalibur debacle had some ties to work out on 128, and Ares' numerous subsidiaries specializing in government defense contracts have been facing some unexpected challengers since the brand-faith in Ares products took a hit. The introduction of the fifth model of Ares Predator at the beginning of last year and lack of new catastrophic product failures has helped, but the dearth of new innovative designs has hurt the company image, and speculation persists about trouble among Ares leaders. All things considered, it's not much of a surprise that Boston is not a primary focus for Ares.

With that being said, I would like to point out the success of the Ares Strategic Action and Combat Simulator (ASACS). This facility has become a standard training ground for police and military forces from around the world. Not only does KE run advanced training classes and seminars out of the business offices at the facility, but they also host anyone who wants to train in the most realistic, fully AR equipped, and infinitely variable environments created indoors. The place is the next-generation evolution of the Fort Lewis Combat Simulator out in Seattle. Ares has another ASACS facility on an island in Southeast Asia as well. This place will replicate almost any environment, and it uses near-hot-SIM trode feeds

to deliver virtual sensations (cold, pain, heat, pressure, etc.) and can even cause natural reactions to AR objects, such as spasming a muscle to trip over a box on the ground or making muscles twitch in reaction to uneven or loose surfaces such as jagged rocks or sand. This place is big business for Ares in Boston and a frequent target of data steals to get a look at their code.

- I got a chance to play in this place when my merc company earned some time there for buying a gross of Predator Vs. It's everything Icarus says and more. Not only do they simulate different environments like caves, cities, forests, and anything else a twisted tactical mind can imagine, they can simulate conditions like rain, wind, snow, heat, and even heavy gravity. It is awesome.
- Picador

- How do they simulate heavy gravity? That sounds like bulldrek.
- Sticks

- From what I felt they just added extra fatigue to the legs and changed the ballistics rules. Other than that I'm not sure. I was too busy trying to assault an alien fortress without getting shot to do a detailed assessment. Getting hit in there felt way too close to getting hit in real life. Might actually have been worse (in the short-term—the effects wear off much quicker).
- Picador

- This place is where Ares really got the feeling they needed to focus efforts in the laser weapon department. During combat simulations here they found even less-trained troops can defeat a superior trained force with the lasers due to increased accuracy and decreased need for ballistics understanding.
- Am-Mut

- I would buy that. We ran a few simulations with lasers and they are far easier to use. No recoil, no bullet drop or wind variation, very easy to aim with a smartlink system, and a bitch to dodge. Dead on almost every time you squeeze the trigger.
- Picador

- Aliens and laser weapons? What kind of training were you doing, Picador?
- Goat Foot

- The fun kind. It was free and the crew wanted to play so I let them. Damn good time.
- Picador

- What a waste of an opportunity. You get time in one of the best training environments in the world and you use it to play Space Rangers 5125. WTF?
- Goat Foot

- After three straight cycles of training in THE BEST training environment in the world, I wanted my guys to have a little fun.
- Picador

- The "BEST training environment in the world"?
- Netcat

- Real life. In this case, the jungles of Central America.
- Picador

- Ah. I see.
- Netcat

Also, rumors along the Boston grapevine claim Ares has managed to produce successful prototypes for three models of fully automatic laser. I don't think that's something KE will be field-testing, but you never know. Maybe some of their special response teams or Firewatch squads will get to play with them.

- Careful with any new Ares lasertech. A lot of internal ops have been going on as well as outside attacks, and some of the stuff they are making is still glitchy. Those leadership issues have a way of trickling down.
- Sticks

- Even after all this time I can't get used to Sticks talking against Ares goodies. But what he says is good advice. The early MP models are pretty solid, but any newer goods might have the taint of Excalibur on them.
- Clockwork

- The Taint of Excalibur. Sounds like a b-rate trid. I'm not an Ares salesman or anything, but I have to say that the laser products are getting extra scrutiny and beta testing because they have been particularly effective against the bugs. If they land in the hands of a Firewatch team, you can assume it's been tested to the nth degree.
- Picador

EVO

Word of difficulties plaguing Evo's Boston operations first surfaced eighteen or nineteen months ago, but no one could get a handle on what was going wrong or why—until the revelation of CFD. Now that we know, we've got a fairly good picture of what Evo, and its well-known Yamatetsu brand, have been focused on here in the Hub. If you want to find Evo hard at work,

look out on 128, where they own at least three major research facilities under different names, or around the Charleston docks, where Yamatetsu Naval Technologies still has a small-ships' dry dock, or out on the edge of the Boston Naval Shipyards where they have a dry dock for the big ships. I'm not a mil-spec tech guy, but it looks big enough for an aircraft carrier to me.

Out on 128, Evo's focus seems split between developing newer and better cyber and bio enhancement systems and trying to test and clean up nanotech and geneware enhancements. We all know it's probably because of all the CFD stuff, but the general population doesn't know anything more about CFD than most of us did a year ago. Since then, we've lost friends and spread info, but we are a small community and not one the world will take as credible. None of the megas have stepped up and claimed responsibility (though we all have our current favorites), and no one has really explained this issue to the world. So the corps heavily invested in genetech and nanotech, like Evo, are scrambling to find ways to get rid of CFD and to develop tech modifications that prevent future CFD infections. Consider this if you ever consider running an op against Evo's subs out on 128: They will have samples of the virus on hand. Take that however you want.

- I can't take it as anything but a warning, though I know others might see it as a payday. I've warned about it before—CFD is like nothing you have ever faced, and there are not many protections that work. Do not mess with this slitch.
- Butch

Down along the waters a lot of YNT vessels have passed through the dry dock facilities in the past year. Again, it may have to do with CFD and the odd effect it has on nanite systems outside a person, but it also means a lot of YNT's SOTA naval tech is sitting there waiting for folks like us to go take a peek. The possible CFD issue means that some of those systems we go to take a peek at may have some glitchy drek going on with them, so decker beware. One last warning about messing around near the dry dock facilities: Evo Marines. When the ships come in, their complement of seamen, including their marines, all stick around. Many rotate into the security detail for the facility, but most of the time they are simply assigned as additional security on and around the ship.

- Evo's 128 operations involve some advanced transhumanist experimentation. I got an op brief for our merc outfit to field a small recovery team. I didn't take the gig, but I asked for more specifics. When they refused, I changed plans and just put two of my best scouts on the trail off the books. What they caught might have once been human, but it was not even close anymore. Hexipedal, black skin, claws, sticky hands, piranha teeth, five eyes evenly spaced around the head, and thick dermal depositing. The scouts watched the thing stalk and shred three of the street runners Evo got to do the job. They popped the thing, which took seven well-placed rounds from a SM-5, and then let the last few runners take the kill in.
- Picador

AZTECHNOLOGY

The big news of 2074 was the victory of Aztlan in the Az-Am War, which really means a win for Aztechnology. In 2075 the big news was rebuilding after all the losses they faced at the claws of Sirrurg, as well as the bombs, bullets, and spells of Amazonia, and negative publicity by the media, while fending off continued attacks and reprisals by the many dragons of the world that have scores to settle with the Azzies.

So far 2076 has seen Aztechnology on the defensive everywhere, including Boston. All Aztechnology facilities and the facilities of all their subsidiaries have received enhanced security. No one who is not Aztechnology or an Aztlan citizen gets beyond the first two floors of their pyramid on the water. The price of a useable counterfeit Azzie SIN has tripled in the shadows—if you can find one. AZT has been coming down hard on forgers, hard enough that a lot of them won't take AZT work.

On the business side of things, Aztechnology has been earning a lot of positive Boston street cred. They used SOTA tech to clean up the water along the waterfront around their HQ. They've stocked the protected area with unmodified fish and plants native to the Bay and opened the area to public swimming and scuba-diving. It's been clean since the beginning of summer last year, but it took a little time for people to trust it; they had to hold competitions offering Azziescrip prizes to lure the first few hundred swimmers into the water. Now the media are filled with images of happy swimmers and glowing testimonials about cleanliness and safety; the place is so popular it won't be too long before you'll need a reservation to get in. Speaking of which: Rumor has it that the underwater restaurant will be opening later this year. Evidently its usefulness as a test lab ended when they cleaned up the water and the potential PR payday outweighs their worries about letting the general public inside their HQ. For us this means runs against the pyramid and some of their other research and testing fa-

cilities and stations around the area, trying to track down paydata on this new tech.

- I've heard the water isn't being cleaned. It's just clean water being pumped into the blocked-off area and the dirty water being kept out by spirits.
- Southie

- Someone would have commented on a spirit presence if it were there, especially with all the MIT&T students who were enjoying the spot during their summer break.
- Arete

- The clean water flush would be tough too, especially with as much wildlife as they have down there. Temperature fluctuations and water flow would be tough to regulate, not to mention all the stuff that could be introduced with unfiltered water. And you couldn't use "clean" water or you'd mess up the system. This might actually be the real deal.
- Beaker

I couldn't skip over the magical aspect of Aztechnology. With their keen interest in blood magic and cybermancy, you know they are scouring MIT&T for anyone with the moral flexibility and hunger for power it takes to walk those dark paths. They often hire runners to take candidates out on jobs to test just how flexible the kids' morals really are. The work usually involves some focused violence and trips to the darker haunts of the Rox or the Catacombs. The kiddies think they're breaking into hardcore crime while their every word, look, and twitch is being recorded from multiple angles for suitability analysis. These runs are little more than paid baby-sitting gigs, but they're a big piece of Azzie work in Boston. There are a few Aztechnology research facilities out on 128 too, hidden among their consumer production facilities. They're developing all sorts of new and horrible magical goodies under cover of assembly lines mass-producing arcane accoutrements for entry-level and wannabe magic slingers.

- That's just wrong.
- Netcat

- That's so AZT.
- Slamm-0!

HORIZON

Since Horizon was still a baby corp when the ECSE was in Boston, they never established a major presence here. The heart of their R&D division is in LA and they have satellite labs and testing sites throughout the PCC, so they have no interest in the 128 corridor. They have close relationships with UCLA and CalTech and Thaum from which they recruit almost all of their new talent, so MIT&T and Harvard hold no interest for them. What brings them to Boston is the music. Boston has a hot independent music scene and Horizon likes to headhunt up and comers, getting them under contract before any rivals see their potential. With no major business operations to distract them, they are extremely focused on working the music scene. Horizon's intensely meritocratic internal organization and results-based business model, their talent agents compete against each other ruthlessly. But trying to exploit that rivalry rarely pays off. When it comes to beating out another media corp, they put their individual agendas aside and become a seamless team determined to get what's best for Horizon.

The shadows in the music and club scenes have been tense since Damon came to town. Damon's investments have often interfered with Horizon's plans, and his eye for talent is better than that of any metahuman in Horizon's stable. That means a lot of the Horizon agents are watching Damon's moves and his pet clubs to try to snatch up talent right from under the dragon's snout (figuratively speaking—he's rarely in his native form, and when he is no metahuman's going to get that close). That being said, they have been known to grab acts right from his clubs.

Their media battles have also put them at odds in Boston with a number of S-K subsidiaries. S-K's media works have offices and studios here that compete directly with Horizon's operations. Just know that if you're making runs for American Broadcasting Systems and Pathfinder Multimedia, you're really working for S-K and Horizon, respectively.

- I appreciate the view-to-the-top mentality, and I always do my due diligence to see who I'm really working for, but to say every time ABS or Pathfinder contract a job it's the global machinations of the megacorporations, well, that's just ridiculous.
- 2XL

- When it comes to NeoNET or Ares and their diverse internal factions, I think 2XL has a point. But Horizon and S-K aren't near as split at the top. These are the kind of corps where you might need to worry who you could be pissing off by playing for these teams.
- Sticks

- This seems as good a place to put this as any. Horizon is a major supporter of Warpath. I don't mean openly, but a lot of runs get contracted through Horizon channels that positively affect the efforts of Warpath.
- Mika

WUXING, INC.

I'm a huge fan of Wuxing. Not for their amazing corporate maneuvering or massive global domination, but for their conservative nature and global anonymity. It's easy to be anonymous as a shadowrunner, but if you want to be successful someone has to know what kind of work you do and that you do it. Wuxing is the exact opposite. They make moves, make money, and no one can ever seem to tell you what they are really all about.

Which is why it's not surprising that Wuxing's name cannot be found anywhere near their biggest operation in Boston: Fidelity Mutual Insurance. FMI is a huge insurance firm that acts as Wuxing's secondary connection to many, many corporations; FMI insures their people and property while Wuxing takes care of all their financial needs, including holding their loans. FMI almost went down the drain after the Crash. They were a major carrier in Boston, and Winternight did a lot of damage they had to pay for. Almost no one expected them to survive. If you had told anyone—me included—a week after the Crash that FMI would be worth double its pre-Crash value in just a decade, they would have thought you were crazy. But this past January FMI celebrated that amazing milestone.

Because even though FMI almost went bankrupt paying out its claims, it gained an unshakeable reputation as the insurance company that had your back. Loyalty is huge in Boston, and loyalty to the brand became a badge of honor. FMI had the wit to respect that loyalty and didn't gouge their clients by trying to make their losses back quickly. They played the long game and played it well, and today they have more clients and more money than ever before. And, sadly, more crooks trying to make bad claims—which is where a lot of their jobs for runners come in, especially skilled investigators. Paying a runner a couple grand to uncover the truth is far cheaper than paying a client a million. Yes, they have an Investigations Division, but runners are so much better and more efficient than folks who have to follow laws. Plus, if the client still tries to push, runners make a great way to push back. They're good gigs if you can get on the list, but stay honest. Getting blacklisted from FMI's ID list pretty much guarantees you are done in the Northeast.

Wuxing's second-largest operation in the region is not hidden behind another name, yet it does things one would expect Wuxing to not want associated with their name. Wuxing Worldwide Shipping is a mid-sized company, maybe on the larger side of average for the Port of Boston, that has enough legitimate cargo coming in and going out to mask their lucrative smuggling operation. For the right price they move almost anything, but these days the hottest items on any WWS freighter are the BADs. Most shadowfolk know that WWS is Damon's shipper of choice. This info did not spread because of some big bust or surprising leaked intel, but rather because WWS makes sure their workers know about this fact. It's a double dose of security. The workers aren't likely to steal if they know the owner is a dragon, and the workers are very likely to spread the word so everyone else knows who they would be stealing from if they interfere with a WWS shipment.

- Stealing anything from WWS ships is a tough gig. They have solid security, and since smuggling is what they do, every boat has additional non-traditional security assets. Often these assets are dressed like the rest of the crew but able to kill quickly and quietly with whatever is at hand, including their bare hands.
- Kane

- Spoken like a man with experience.
- Seeker

- Someone tell me why we let all these fragging rookies in again.
- Kane

- So you could have someone who is juvenile enough to be impressed by your shenanigans.
- Thorn

- Did you seriously just use the word "shenanigans"? Is this the old folks home?
- Seeker

- Are you insinuating my use of such antiquated colloquial terms is a sign of my senility and lack of skill?
- Thorn

- Maybe I am. Whatcha gonna do about it gramps?
- Seeker

- WHOA!! First, Thorn, leave the kid alone. You know the rules about JP members going after each other. Second, Seeker, shut up and log off for a bit. That is not the man you want to start a pissing contest with. Warnings issued!
- Bull

- Nice. The elderly are teaming up to protect each other. Maybe they'll beat me with their...aaaaaaaaggghhhh!!
- Seeker

>>>>>JackHammer application successful<<<<<

- Oops. Wrong hammer.
- Bull

- Bull, take a break before I force it on you with the right hammer. Sticks, you're on notice that your nominee has been warned.
- Glitch

- I'll chat with him. Sorry, Thorn. He's still got a little punk kid in him.
- Sticks

- Not to worry, Sticks. If my schedule brings me to the same continent as your impertinent young protégé I will deliver a lesson to him he will not likely forget. But don't worry, oh mighty three stooges, I won't kill him.
- Thorn

AQUA ARCANA

It's just not possible to talk about Boston business and leave out Aqua Arcana. These guys have been being billed as the saviors of the bay ever since they started seriously looking into cleaning up the place in the '60s. They sunk a small aquacology off the coast as a research base and have been pulling in funding for toxic cleanup research ever since. The aquacology itself is well secured; the only weak point in its security is the need to move staff to and from the place. They use a retractable elevator system that sends a floating cage up to the surface; once the ship and station are attached to their respective ends of the shaft, they run the elevator up and down six times—all the trips they need to completely switch out the staff. This was the only way in or out for years. Now they run a few submersibles, but they are expensive and are primarily used for cargo and other things you can cram in a metal can and drone pilot to the station.

The research that goes on in this place is pretty amazing, and the aqua-pen attached to the station is a frequent advertising image for the company. There has been talk of allowing tourists a chance to dive to the pen, but pollution, safety, and security concerns have been keeping that monetary windfall at bay. The pen is a massive dome-shaped cage with all sorts of modified sea-life swimming around in it. The creatures in the pen are test subjects and gengineered species that AqAr may try and re-introduce to the local ecosystem once they have been fully tested. Aqua Arcana likes to keep their reputation solid so they have avoided hasty releases and stupid moneymaking publicity stunts.

- Two things: First, they've avoided early releases and PR headaches only through the good efforts of people like us. They field-test these critters all the time. They just do it quietly. Second, why would they actually want to succeed when they keep getting money. The donations to this place far exceed the funding it needs. Operating this place actually posts a profit for AqAr, instead of the money sinkholes that most R&D facilities are.
- Mr. Bonds

PROTEUS

Proteus has been doing some serious development around Boston. On the surface Aqua Arcana and Proteus share an objective: rehabilitating and reclaiming the polluted environment, but their approaches to the problem are completely opposite. Where Aqua Arcana sank a research station, Proteus planted an arkoblock in the center of one of the most polluted cesspools in the waters around Boston. It was both a demonstration of their abilities and a security measure for the paranoid corp. Since then they have been doing a lot of the same work as the smaller corp but with a different focus. Where AqAr is trying to adapt local species and reintroduce them, Proteus is heavily modifying species and making them suitable to live well in the toxic environment. Some have claimed that they are terraforming the local ecosystem instead of fixing it, but Proteus argues that life finds a way. They are just helping out the process. They are also famous for their "Food Web" style of genetic modifications, where they make sure to modify and introduce species according to their place on the food web.

Along with that arkoblock, Proteus has a number of underwater testing facilities all over the region, including some deeper lakes and rivers. In a few rivers that don't look deep enough—and aren't in any database—they sank the facility into the mud and dirt below. These facilities give Proteus a lot of very private places in which to do—and hide—their work.

- Proteus is also here to keep an eye on local biomedical advancements for their genetic-enhancement projects. Most folks think of Evo as the corp of freaks, but they have nothing on some of Proteus' Modified Environment Organisms (MEO). Those folks will never fit back into society. Hell, from what I hear many of them can't even survive in a clean Earth environment.
- Beaker

- Proteus contracts out some interesting security operations to those who like that kind of thing. Since so many of their operations are in toxic areas, they occasionally have problems with toxic shamans. Profitable double-dip opportunity if you can catch the toxic alive and deliver them to the Draco Foundation.
- Hard Exit

MAERSK

I couldn't possibly leave out Maersk if I'm talking about a shipping hub like Boston. Especially since Maersk built

most of the port facilities around Boston. Maersk makes a lot of money off its Boston Harbor operations—not just leasing all those facilities to the city and other corps, but their shipbuilding (and, according to their PR handouts, arkoblock building and dock building) complex on Thompson Island. Not mentioned in their official releases is the fact that the secure, private island is also ideal for manufacturing all sorts of things they don't acknowledge. My sources have confirmed—to varying degrees of certainty—that Maersk produces electronics, smart materials, and components for their space programs on Thomas Island. No doubt there are other, even more closely guarded projects in progress on the island.

It's also good to mention Maersk occasionally hires irregular assets to either operate on their ships as security or to test their ships' security. As we all know there are evil pirates out there looking to loot, pillage, and rob any innocent merchant's ship they can get there dirty little hook hands on, and Maersk tries to do what it can to be ready for them.

- Cute Icarus. I'll try not to take offense. Actually Maersk rarely has anything of value belonging to them on the big freighters; instead they use custom armored boats to transport their goodies. These things are awesome to behold and even more fun to run down.
- Kane

- Also good to know from whichever side you are working is the fact that Maersk is a AA-rated corporation and therefore has extraterritoriality. Step onto their ship and you are theirs to do with as they please, which usually means getting keelhauled or turned into chum.
- Goat Foot

- I recently looked up what keelhauling really was. That's just twisted.
- Slamm-0!

- Also good to point out is that calling anyone on or associated with the dock "chummer" is a bad idea. Doesn't mean the same thing there as it does other places.
- Turbo Bunny

CROSS BIOMEDICAL

Though the days of Cross Applied Technologies as a power in the megacorporate world are long past, some divisions—like Cross Biomedical—are still going strong. In Boston, Cross Biomedical is one of the top-five employers for anyone interested in being at the forefront of biomedical advancement. They have offices at most of the major hospitals, operate research labs out of MIT&T and Harvard Medical, and often run field-testing out of the Rox and the Wilds. Those last often mean work for those in the shadows.

They're a tough little corp, and they fight hard to keep their discoveries as their own. Of course, they work hard to make the discoveries made by other biomed companies their own as well—under the watchful eye, it is rumored, of a former Seraphim. Their intel operations are solid, and they gather almost all of their own intel before hiring outside assets to carry out an operation. This makes for nice, even easy, work—when you get your info from pros like theirs, the only way you can really screw up is by not using the intel. Of course, them doing all the scouting and legwork makes their operations low-paying and often pretty boring.

- I'll take easy-money runs every day of the week over big-risk runs. The lack of overhead (read: medical bills) tends to balance out the lower pay.
- Ma'fan

- CB's gigs are also nice for those who have moral disagreements with violence. They prefer their operations to adhere to the "do no harm" clause of the Hippocratic Oath. Though stealing another person's livelihood or messing with a cure for cancer so your company can get it out first doesn't quite mesh with that, does it? Oh well. Hippocrates, hypocrisy, they sound alike, right?
- Butch

DOC WAGON

Most people think of HTR teams coming in to save their dying friend when they hear the name Doc Wagon, but here in Boston Doc Wagon is also associated with medical advancement and long-term medical care. Their name is displayed prominently all over Massachusetts General Hospital—in fact the hospital's official name is Doc Wagon's Massachusetts General Hospital. Boston is not only the location of their corporate offices, but also their primary trauma center and dispatch office. Boston is one of the best towns to have a DW contract in since their R&D accomplishments first get deployed here.

- So do their failures. When you sign a Basic level contract, you are agreeing to be experimented on. In the fine print it states that DW can use DW-exclusive pharmaceuticals and techniques if deemed appropriate by the attending physician. In the field your attending physician is also defined as any DW certified med tech. Meaning that if you are in the field and the DW medic is currently under orders by his corporate bosses to administer a dose of test drug A to every appropriate subject, you get the test drug. The fine print doesn't say appropriate to you, just appropriate.
- Butch

Since CrashCart also has extensive operations in the city, DW often targets their rival's rigs and med techs for

thefts and extractions. They loot any CrashCart exclusive materials to keep up on whatever the competition has going for it and sell the rigs to chop shops. Sales of the rigs usually pays for the run, so even if they find nothing new they still break even. If the runners are lousy negotiators, they make a profit. Though I specifically mentioned CrashCart, operations like this are undertaken against every emergency medical service provider that operates in Boston.

- These jobs run both ways. Other companies looking to snag DW's goodies hire runners to jack DW's rigs.
- Southie

DUNKELZAHN INSTITUTE FOR MAGICAL RESEARCH

The DIMR is not exactly a corporate entity but it has been involved in a lot of corporate activity over the years. Many of us have heard about or participated in runs involving some ancient artifact or another. The artifacts collected from the Watergate Rift were sent to Boston—to MIT&T and Harvard—for initial analysis. MIT&T covered the arcane side while Harvard handled the bulk of the archaeology (MIT&T is still a little behind in their arcanoarchaeology programs).

This has meant a lot of interactions with the other corporations and even a few petitions to the Corporate Court when the corporation in question decided to use their own forces instead of the traditional shadow assets. Though these activities have slowed since the events that closed the Watergate Rift, they haven't even come close to stopping. The DIMR is rumored to have an abundance of old items and artifacts in their Boston facility in the Hub.

When the DIMR loans high-value items to researchers at MIT&T and Harvard, they provide their own security: a spirit, either one bound into long-term service, or a free spirit in their employ. Of course they do their own research on their artifacts; files of their data and analyses are as likely (sometimes more likely) to be targeted than the items themselves.

- The artifact hunt for the big four may have waned (though rumors about Antarctic oddities have brought more attention to the Piri Reis map), but there is still big money and a wide array of work in the realm of artifact hunting. The funny thing is DIMR doesn't fund a lot of artifact hunts, but they end up with the artifacts anyway when no one else can figure out how they work.
- Frosty

- Kellan Colt is based in Seattle, but she has a lot of friends in the Boston DIMR office. She's well known in artifact-acquisition circles and has gained quite a bit of renown for her identification and activation skills. It's very possible she would contract a team to head in for her. Or maybe even head in *with* her. She has no trouble going into whatever rough place her job takes her.
- Winterhawk

ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

If I'm going to mention the DIMR, I need to mention the AF. Though based out of the CAS, the Atlantean Foundation has several offices in the Boston area. Their main office is in the Hub, but it's primarily used for meetings and clerical work. Their real research goes on out on the Corridor (Highway 128/I-95), and they make use of the labs and minds at MIT&T on occasion. Though most of their serious research is conducted at Texas A&M&T or Georgia Thaum, Boston is often the first stop for artifacts the foundation finds overseas.

- Speaking of, there is a ship somewhere in the harbor with a load of relics from Europe and the Middle East that AF was sending back for research. Its intended port of call was Boston, and it hasn't appeared anywhere yet. My guess is it slipped in when the quarantine was going into effect but was never logged due to the clog up of the Harbor at that time.
- Balladeer

Their main business in Boston is keeping tabs on the other big arcane players in town like Wuxing, MCT, Manadyne, and DIMR. They have a host of agents working within these other organizations around Boston that feed the AF reports whenever they can. Along with those, they also have field agents who frequently contract, and occasionally work with, shadowrunners to acquire items and data for them.

DRACONIC AFFAIRS

POSTED BY: ARETE

Historically Boston is not a legendary city of dragons, and yet not one, but two of the creatures are currently calling it home. Back in the Clutch file we got a goodly amount of information on Damon, and I'll update that since he's still here, and also share info on Celedyr, who has pretty much settled in Boston as his home away from Caerleon. Luckily there are plenty of Bostonians with Welsh ancestry to make him feel at home. Other than that I'll just drop some other sightings and rumors on you before I take a nap and wait for the triumvirate to feed us the inside scoop.

DAMON

The (literal) local party-paranimal has not moved on like others had projected. If anything he has actually settled more into the city. His fling with Mayor Meghan was

short-lived but seems to have paid off in spades as a way to keep the city government off his back. His relationship with the witches has been longer than the one with the mayor, and it is as full of troubles as any real relationship. He's settled on a side in the mob issues. His corporate connections appear to have expanded. His legitimate and illicit enterprises have all been successful and profitable. His rambunctious nature has not waned. We have also reached a point of almost one hundred percent confirmation on his draconic nature after all the speculation. Let me expound on all this.

- The Damon Moves On pool is still open. Dates are still available, and the pot grows every day. Did the date you first picked already pass by? Another fifty buys you a new one!
- /dev/grrl

- dev, I think you might have a gambling problem.
- Netcat

First, the mayoral relationship. This will be short, there wasn't much to it. Damon and Meghan O'Rylan were the hottest couple in town for the tabloid photogs for about three months before the pressures of office made Mayor Meghan step back. Honestly, I think they are still seeing each other, but no one spots them together anymore. Whatever his current relationship status is, Damon seems to have earned a whole pile of get-out-of-jail free cards as the city never seems to look too deeply into his illicit dealings.

- Word is no one who sees the two of them together survives. A photo popped up about a month ago. One shot, uploaded to an ABS media site, and then nothing else. The photographer who uploaded the photo disappeared. The company isn't saying where the photographer is, what they paid him, or if they paid him. There have been a number of runs contracted out of Damon-backed clubs to get all traces of that photo purged.
- Southie

Oh, the Witches of Salem, how I love your wild and carefree celebrations. Damon has continued to attend every Wiccan holiday celebration, and the events continue to draw huge crowds—the only limit seems to be the size of the venue. Southie explained the anti-Damonite's sentiment not being personal, that it's just opposition to the presence of any dragon. But recently another group has formed that is actively opposed to Damon himself. There are witches on both sides of the issue, but there's a steady trickle of members from the anti-Damon's presence group to the anti-Damon group. These ladies have been contracting jobs to hurt his business in Boston in an effort to get him to leave. Thus far it hasn't worked, which may have something to do with the classic Wiccan philosophy of balance and the rule of three, where what you do comes back at you in triple. That can be a pretty effective deterrent when you consider a dragon's ability to deliver. The kiddie wands might be cast aside in favor of more potent weapons soon, though. Word is the anti-Damon crowd has gained a pair of leaders who don't care about the Wiccan tradition. In fact, most rumors peg them as a toxic wolf shaman and a free toxic spirit of beasts. Not good news for Damon, but really just as bad of news for the witches. If the shit comes back threefold, it's coming because of that pair of dark-king spawn.

- Bad play, witches. I'm no fan of dragons, but that's a Faustian deal if I ever saw one.
- Frosty

Morelli or O'Rilley. Which side did Damon choose? (Drumroll please.) Neither. O'Rilley kept coming after Damon's shipments and inroads while Morelli kept pushing for Damon to expand his operations alongside the mob. Damon looked for support in getting O'Rilley off his scales from the Morellis and then went to O'Rilley and offered to expand his BAD business with them if they'd leave him be. When Morelli took him at his word and went after O'Rilley, it looked like they were trying to horn in on their deal with Damon. Cue series of quickly escalating mob skirmishes until the Commissione stepped in and told them to knock it off. Damon, having gotten a good look at O'Rilley's connections, promptly exploited them. He took the Mafia family down a peg while opening up and expanding his import/export routes. Laughed all the way to the bank.

- The Commissione is ticked. They know they got duped and used. Damon is definitely going to feel some backlash from that little game.
- Fianchetto

- Angelo Morelli got trapped in the middle of it all and ended up targeted for a hit. Damon saved his ass, and now the soldato works for the dragon. I heard a rumor that after Damon stopped the hitters, Angelo nearly knocked him out cold with a haymaker. It was like thug bonding.
- Southie

- Or another day in South Boston, but what's the difference. ;)
- Sticks

Damon's speculated connections to Celedyr have been solidified. Though he does not work directly for Celedyr, there are definite connections between the two on the corporate side of things, confirmed by runners in Boston tracing work contracted through Damon back to Celedyr's operations. The relationship seems to fit the "trusted Johnson" role more than anything else. Most

of the runs Damon ends up brokering involve Celedyr's interest in old rituals and ancient European artifacts, especially those related to cultures with a rich dragon lore.

Along with connections to Celedyr (and not necessarily NeoNET), Damon has also made some interesting connections at Wuxing. To be specific, Wuxing Worldwide Shipping and their smuggling operation. This little relationship was already in development when Southie reported, but he didn't have the full story. These days almost every criminal in Boston knows that Damon uses WWS and that messing with their smuggling ops could very well mean messing with a dragon. Now I'm not saying this doesn't happen, but it's always a good idea to do a little extra legwork to find out if a WWS freighter you are targeting is carrying any of Damon's goods—-/ or should I say BADs.

- Can we penalize Arete for bad jokes?
- Slamm-0!

- Only if we can do the same to you.
- Glitch

Mentioning his BADs makes for a smooth transition into Damon's illegal operations. Thanks to his connections in city hall, that slick divide-and-conquer of the local Mafia families, and a growing supply chain, Damon has become *the* source for Bio-Awakened Drugs (BADs) in Boston and throughout most of the NEMA. He brings enough in from growers around Salem to keep the local economy healthy, but gets the bulk of his product from growers all around the world. Most people believe he uses WWS to smuggle it in, and rumor has it he cut the mob in for one percent of his gross, which is evidently enough vig to keep them from coming after him hard even though he pissed of the Commissione. Money talks. The industry can't be a major moneymaker, since too many people still fear BADs after all the tempo craziness, but the rarity and expense makes for a nice—and growing—little income stream.

- Word on the street is that the Yakuza, though small in Boston, may be putting pressure on Damon to let them share in the pie. The Yaks are representing the entire Japanacorp bloc. Offers of discounted shipping through Shiawase and smoother passage into the harbor provided by Renraku may pull Damon away from Wuxing and put him at odds with the Mafia.
- Mihoshi Oni

- It would take a lot of pressure and convincing to make Damon move his business over to the Japanacorps, especially with their ties to other Great Dragons. Though if Celedyr were looking for additional draconic support, this could be the way to go.
- Frosty

In Southie's version of things, Damon had his talons into five local clubs. Building on the success of those clubs, as well as successes in other areas, including the media industry, Damon now has a piece of twenty-eight clubs all over the Beantown plex. He still doesn't own any of them but I-Ching, Damon's cover corp, has dropped hundreds of thousands of nuyen into these places and received millions in return. Every night he visits a few, rarely staying more than an hour at any one, so every club can count on at least one Damon visit a week, which gives all of them a boost. His visits don't follow any discernible pattern, so even ones he doesn't hit benefit from additional traffic from customers hoping he will.

Damon's clubs are the place to see up-and-coming music acts. Media companies flock to these places to try and out-deal the dragon, and many use our help when the deals aren't quite sweet enough. A few of the clubs have actually hosted already-famous acts opening for the budding stars. I'm sure it's a sweet gig, since they probably make a full payday for playing a half-set. I managed to catch 3-Meter Rock opening for Karne Adwell, the troll crooner. Interesting mix, but 3-Meter pulled in the meta crowd, mostly troll-thrash junkies, who stuck around for Karne's set. Never have I seen so many punked out trolls belting out ballad choruses in my life. Quite a sight. Damon is good at all this, and Boston loves him.

- To bad Karne went to Pathfinder instead of signing with Weekday Eclipse or I-Ching Entertainment. Damon doesn't win them all.
- Bull

- Karne's a bad egg. Check the screamsheets from Aztechnology and you'll see why.
- Pyramid Watcher

His adrenaline-junkie antics continue, and the Rox hunts actually have a Matrix site now [link]. They post feeds from most of the hunts. He's still undefeated, but there have been some close calls. A few police and military forces have even taken a crack at him with their paranimal-control teams. Good practice for them, but he is a dragon, not some lone barghest.

- The close calls have all been teams with heavy augmentation and strong magical support. The spellslingers try to jam the astral, while the speed freaks wait for the first assault and then return fire. They're fun to watch if you have the time.
- Sticks

Last but not least is the total eradication of any doubt that Damon is a dragon. The initial proof came when one of his clubs was attacked while he was there. He wasn't the target, but he obviously wasn't willing to let his pa-

trons get gunned down while he stood by and watched. He went full dracoform, took probably fifty machine-pistol and SMG rounds playing dragon shield, and then knocked out half the club's patrons, including the attackers, with a massive sleep spell. He covered drinks for everyone the rest of the night and canceled the rest of his club visits to stick around and talk. Since then he has revealed his dragon form a number of times. He's been known to step out in the street and fly from club to club instead of taking his Dynamit or limo.

As for his appearance, Southie's contact had it right. Sky-blue belly, midnight-blue back, long alligator-like snout, split tail, and rather small for an adult western dragon, maybe ten meters snout to tail tip. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he was only eight meters. Yep, that small. He still avoids spending a lot of time in his natural form for some reason, instead choosing to appear in one of his many metahuman forms.

- I thought only great dragons could take metahuman form.
- Southie

- Greats have a specific metahuman form that they earn with their status as a Great. Adult dragons like Damon, Urubia, and Perianwyr use sorcery to appear metahuman. I pierced Perianwyr's masking once and found a dozen different spells stacked up on him. I'm sure that's the trick.
- Frosty

CELEDYR

I want to say, first and foremost, that I think Celedyr was an excellent choice as Loremaster for the dragons. Though he's not as personable as Dunkelzahn was, he is demonstrably more interested in engaging with metahumans than ruling them—and that to me feels like a win for us little people.

Since returning last January with the new title of Loremaster, Celedyr has spent almost all of his time in Boston instead of Caerleon. Some speculated that he had lost his home lair, much like Hestaby. But when some investigations found the Caerleon lair still full of spirits and guarded by the Knights of Rage, people realized it was still Celedyr's. The investigators who survived sticking their noses too close to Caerleon switched up and came to Boston to find out what Celedyr was up to over here.

With NeoNET and S-K being major targets for anti-dragon forces, Celedyr has been more casual about appearing in public—and looking obviously comfortable while doing so—than anyone expected. Lofwyr has been orchestrating a lot of defensive operations, but Celedyr doesn't seem to have the same agenda—unless the Welsh dragon's plan is to get the city of Boston to love him so much they chase off his enemies.

Between speaking events at MIT&T where he discussed the new grid protocols, NeoNET's advancements in electrokinetic (technomancer) understanding, and the latest innovations being developed by NeoNET, Celedyr has gained a much "friendlier" reputation with the city. He even assumed human form to throw out the first pitch of the Red Sox season (and he's got quite the fastball). His image boost hasn't only been through his actions, but through the actions of his new Voice, Zoh Rothberg. An incident at Transys' labs in Caerleon last year left Per Engstomm among the casualties. His new Voice is almost as popular in Boston as Mayor Meghan. In fact, the pair are often the target of "Who Wore it Better," the mindless Matrix tabloid that gets pics of celebrities in similar outfits and then lets the public declare who looked better. The contests between Rothberg and O'Rylan are usually close and very popular.

- Best contest of the year was in March when Zoh and Celedyr stepped out for St. Patty's day, and so did O'Rylan and Damon. Both pairs dressed in similar styles that screamed publicity stunt. The ladies rocked a sexy green mini-dress with shamrock-shaped sequins running diagonal stripes, while the boys both hit the town in their best Boston bad-boy jeans and designer-print dress-shirt look. The voting site crashed no less than a half-dozen times, at least twice from too many voters hitting it at once. The other crashes screamed shadowrun, which made me laugh at any runner who took that gig. Staying strong and fighting the fashion power, I guess.
- /dev/grrl

- Laugh away. They paid well.
- Southie

- Celedyr's popularity has made the local Villiers supporters a little nervous. Samantha was in town for Martin's birthday celebration and got blasted when put up next to Zoh in a very similar black cocktail dress. Party faux pas first off, and then to get slammed on the tabloid site showed a definite change in the winds of Boston.
- Kia

- Samantha Villiers is not a great gauge for Villiers popularity, seeing as how she's the *ex*-wife of the hometown hero. The two of them may get along with each other, but that doesn't mean the rest of us have to like her.
- Southie

- Zoh hasn't been seen publicly since the quarantine started, but then again neither has Celedyr.
- Icarus

Considering the nature of Boston's shadowscene, the dragon's popularity could be the calculated outcome of a sophisticated defense strategy. Any overt efforts to get at him would rattle the city, and this is a city that does not like rattles and especially dislikes whoever's

doing the rattling. If it is his defense plan, I think Celedyr may be better at this game than Lofwyr.

In the shadows Celedyr has been keeping enough steps between him and his Johnsons that most runs never get traced back to the wyrm. He is rumored to be using Damon as Mr. Johnson, but I'm not keen on poking around in the business of two dragons at once so soon after an open hunting season. Maybe I'll dig a little more once I'm absolutely certain the dragons are done bickering.

- That's it? A fragging fluff piece! Arete, you dragonboot-licking coward. I'll give you all more.

  Celedyr has been spending all his time in Boston because he needs to stay protected from anyone who would attack him directly while he desperately flails at saving that freak Eliohann/Cerberus/Neurosis. I read that *Street Legends* file, so I know what I'm fragging talking about. Along with all the equipment that got moved here last January, Eliohann's body got moved as well. I know four guys who were on the Minuteman Elite Engagement Team that took the handoff from the Knights of Rage at the docks. The KoR guys actually refused to fully hand off, and the MEET guys had to let them tag along. From what I heard it was handy because the whole group got jumped before they even left the docks. Long story short, the comatose dragon made it to NeoNET's HQ.

  Slap onto that the other strange things I've heard Damon is contracting runners to snag, including CFD victims, and I had enough to make me curious. So I put a team on digging deeper. I know all the rules about dealing with dragons, but I'm really not keen on letting dragons play whatever games they want in my backyard. Not without at least knowing whether or not it's time to move out of town. My teams found some interesting things about intercorporate alliances and rushed experiments to get Eliohann and Cerberus back in the same body. I'm not a huge fan of giving away paydata for free, though, so hit me up with a PM and I'll give you a figure. Once you drop the nuyen, I'll drop the data.
- Tick-Tock

- You call Arete a coward and then use this haven to sell your data? Not cool. And in fact, not how it works here. You can dump it for free or find your access denied. Your choice.
- Glitch

- Drek. Clock said you all were too serious, and he was right. I'll take my data and see you elitists later. Sorry Clockwork. Thought this scene was cooler. One post and they're all over me. Whatever.
- Tick-Tock

- I know for a fact that Celedyr has been spending heavily on security forces for many of NeoNET's sites out on 128 and the HQ has had much heavier security over the past year, including a few trucks around the towers that have some serious anti-air hardware inside.
- Southie

THE OTHERS

With the new Loremaster holed up in Boston, most folks won't be surprised that quite a few other dragons have stopped by the city. But I feel any dragon activity should be discussed just in case someone somewhere has a bit of information that fits with this bit and another bit and maybe turns the lot into a clue that makes sense. Though the Dragon Civil War is wrapped and the hunting season is closed, not many dragons have shown up in person. Astral spotters, however, have seen the astral forms of almost every known great dragon popping in to see Celedyr at least once in the past sixteen months or so, some multiple times. The only ones who have not come to visit are Hestaby, likely due to her exile; Sirrurg, likely due to his incarceration; and Ghostwalker, likely because he's kind of a dick. Schwartkopf has had the most sightings, followed by Rhonabwy and Lung, with the rest showing up no more than two or three times.

Prominent among the "not many" who have made physical visits to the Boston area are two greats: the Sea Dragon and Arleesh. The Sea Dragon spent some time in Boston Harbor in January, May, and December of 2075 and then February of this year. The sojourns lasted two to five days with ninety percent of that time spent in the harbor. A research ship that looked very expensive and capable from a distance (no one got close) anchored several equally nondescript locations during each visit, protected by a very serious security escort that included a pair of Hunt-class frigates. The Sea Dragon also met with Mayor O'Rylan, several of the top minds from MIT&T, representatives from the Draco Foundation and DIMR, as well as the heads of quite a few local magical groups. From what I could gather, the meetings were about convincing the Sea Dragon we could clean up the local waters while also including a diplomatic injunction to appease her and hopefully forestall her coming in to clean it, and the surrounding urban blight, herself. If I had to guess, it was a nice way to start the score-settling process before she decides to go all "Hestaby in Dubai" on Boston. One significant difference would be the fact that the Sea Dragon does not have the merciful streak of her exiled cousin.

- The Hunt-class boats aren't the only security. Beneath the surface the Sea Dragon was running subs. Mostly small and single-seater models but there was something bigger just off the coast. Didn't get an ID on it and honestly don't even know if that one belonged to the Sea Dragon. If it didn't that might be even more interesting.
- Rigger X

- Just to keep Bostonians from worrying too much, the Sea Dragon wouldn't dare trash the hometown of NeoNET and current home of Celedyr, the Loremaster of the dragons.
- Smiling Bandit

- The Loremaster is not the boss of the dragons, just their historian. It's a highly respected position, but not one that makes Celedyr exempt from dragon retribution.
- Frosty

Arleesh has not been visiting Boston but instead has spent quite a bit of time up in Salem. She's been meeting with the witches and Damon when she's up there. Arleesh is usually associated with either artifacts or arbitration, and it's possible her visits may have been about warning Damon off his search for certain artifacts, or she may have been acting as a neutral facilitator or arbiter helping to settle the situation between Damon and the witches. I'm sure there are plenty of business opportunities for anyone willing to try to find out what these visits were really about.

- There's street talk that the anti-Damon witches are not happy another dragon has come to stick her snout into their business.
- Arete

- Arleesh has been respectful of all sides and spends the majority of her time there in human form.
- Frosty

- I'm sure if the natives get restless (read: violent), she will have no problem going full-on feathered serpent on them to remind them that she is not just a pretty face.
- Arete

With Celedyr making Boston his current home and Damon a semi-permanent visitor, other adult dragons have been hesitant to stop by, and no others have set-

tled here. The exception to this is, of course, Perianwyr. Our favorite music-loving dragon continues to be a regular at Damon's clubs and has reportedly been seen at Avalon talking with well-known fixer, Smedley Pembrenton III. Avalon brings in some good acts, but Peri has never been spotted there when any big names were playing, and those who've seen him say he's there for Pembrenton and not watching the show. Finding out what those two are discussing could probably be very valuable to someone.

SECURITY CONCERNS

POSTED BY: HARD EXIT

Boston has always been a quiet town for runners, or, more accurately, a town for quiet runners. The rules of Boston mean that when you run in Boston you keep it quiet, or you make sure you understand the message you are sending. You fail to do that, and you'll end up blacklisted or floating in the harbor. While the ECSE was here, it was the corps that kept all the shadow operators in line. Now it's the status quo, and most parties don't want to change that, especially Boston's security firms. Boston wouldn't be Boston if the runners got loud.

On the same note, these same protocols are usually observed by the security corps as well. As long as the runners are going to play nice, keep the noise and collateral damage down, and operate like gentlemen, so will the security corps. The rules change when you go extraterritorial, get hunted in the Rox, or get caught out in the Wilds. For the most part, keep the jobs quiet, the hits clean, and the hardware out of sight. Here's a brief rundown on some of the corps you might face in Beantown.

MINUTEMAN SECURITY

Minuteman Security is the primary security firm under the NeoNET megacorporate umbrella. Elsewhere in the world they don't take up a lot of contracts outside of their parent corp and its subsidiaries. Here in Boston, it's a different story. KE may hold the policing contract, but Minuteman has the highest officer count in the city. They provide onsite security for every piece of extraterritorial NeoNET property in the entire NEMA. They also have private property contracts with companies that want a connection to NeoNET, if only to buddy up to the hometown mega.

Minuteman is not only large, it's well organized. They have to be; there are a lot of assets to coordinate, and a lot of contracts that have a privatized backup clause. These clauses mean the internal security force will call for backup from Minuteman instead of local law enforcement. Helps to keep word of trouble from spreading too quickly, but keeping that many reserves ready and able to deploy requires detailed logistics. When a Minuteman site calls for backup, rapid-response teams are sent from the nearest sites; constant real-time communication enables the sites just beyond the ring of first responders to re-allocate assets to cover any voids left by the teams. If more backup is needed, the ring of responders expands, the net result being a well-coordinated cascade of incoming assets. They are exploitable during movement, but it's valuable in the course of a run to know backup is seconds away.

There is a high percentage of augmented officers among the Minuteman units here in Boston. NeoNET may be best known for their Matrix tech, but one of their major pieces, Transys-Neuronet, is on the cutting edge of augmentation. Officers in Boston are offered steep discounts and opportunities to participate in test programs for new designs before they hit the market. Included in the deal are yearly hardware upgrades, constant firmware updates, and having all operating software debugged and updated during their monthly physicals. Even their arcane assets often have at least a few systems produced specifically for them. I've got nothing on whether NeoNET has their own delta-grade clinic, but it wouldn't be a surprise if they did.

- NeoNET has access to a delta clinic. I don't know if they send their average security spellslingers out for that kind of expensive tech, but it is available under the NeoNET umbrella.
- Thorn

As a NeoNET subsidiary, you have to expect these guys to have a SOTA Matrix team, and they do not disappoint. While other firms in Boston put a lot less effort into Matrix security than one would expect, Minuteman makes sure that every site they secure doesn't need a visit by the G-men, or even NeoNET's demi-GODs. They handle their business, and they handle it well. Almost all Minuteman sites have at least two trained Matrix Security Specialists, who reportedly would not look out of place clubbing with some of our very own JP Matrix crew. They usually keep one MSS on site all the time, while the other remotes in from NeoNET's HQ or an offsite Matrix services support office. Speaking of those offices, you always have to beware of a NeoNET Matrix alarm response. Since all the MSS guys are sitting in support pods all in the same building, they often bring friends when they come to check out a problem. Often the main MSS will come in totally exposed, while the rest of those with him sleaze their way onto the site. Do not be fooled by the obviously lone NeoNET MSS who shows up to check the alarm.

Astral security is a priority for many NeoNET projects, especially those under the purview of Celedyr. Minuteman makes extensive use of warding and watcher spirits for onsite facility security. If an alarm is raised, the company uses bound spirits and astral mag-

es as a quick response. The spirit will engage, and the mage will keep an eye on the scene. They can report troop strength and how well they handled the spirit to the team moving in on the physical plane. They use the same cascading reinforcement system, though the arcane resources are often not as close, meaning they usually arrive later than a physical response team. I mentioned before that this was an exploitable system with some drawbacks. The arcane aspect is less exploitable, as the responding mage will usually leave behind a few spirits for site defense, while taking the rest to deal with the threat.

A good thing to mention when dealing with any spellcaster working for NeoNET is the company's promotion and support of ally spirit summoning in order to bolster their arcane security strength. NeoNET offers time off and steep discounts on ritual and summoning materials as well as access to extensive libraries to help every employee capable of summoning summon an ally, as long as the employee agrees to treat the ally well and commits the ally's service to NeoNET. Their efforts have paid off in a lot of surprising ways, as many of their researchers and even their untrained but magically active staff have taken advantage of this perk.

- It's a strange experience to be walking through a cubefarm and suddenly discover you've been made by a random spirit you didn't know was there who can see your buddy hiding under his invisibility spell.

  > Sticks

I could have broken this next security branch up and mentioned it in each area above, but I figured I'd just cover it once and let you all do the cross-referencing. Minuteman may not be as well known as Parashield in the paranormal critter security field, but they are coming up fast and pushing SOTA as they go. Most of this is due to Emerging Futures. The company, famous for implanting the datajack in Eliohann, has been pushing the envelope in paracritter implantation ever since they got picked up by Celedyr and Transys-Neuronet. They can augment almost anything, even Awakened critters, and they have a mind for tactics while doing so. Most of their patrol critters have vision enhancements and camera systems, but they are redundant to their natural vision. A hacker may think they've disabled their enemy's vision systems only to discover too late that all they did was blind the security spider, and the critter is using its own eyes.

- It's a very unpleasant surprise indeed.
- Picador

Besides paracritters, Minuteman has also been working to train e-critters to act as Matrix security. They've begun assigning e-critters to protect the devices of augmented paranimals. Or they'll use it as a tag along that is trained to attack the electronic assets of whatever physical threat the critter engages. Minuteman has done an excellent job of integrating some full-spectrum security assets using a combination of paracritters, e-critters, and a wide array of augmentations.

KNIGHT ERRANT SECURITY

Knight Errant runs the city's police force, and they make a point of honoring the traditions of the old Boston PD—including hiring a whole lot of guys named O'Something and McWhatever. Almost everywhere else KE cultivates their rep as hard-hitting jack-booted thugs, keeping the peace through intimidation, but here in Boston they maintain a sort of idealized version of policing from two centuries ago. Courteous and professional officers on foot patrol the Hub and Cambridge, as well as most of the parks in town, while the windows of their patrol cars are almost always untinted. It's less safe, but here in Boston it's the norm.

KE has had the Boston police contract for as long as the force has been privatized. In the past twenty years, they have weathered many of Boston's changes, and weathered them with tact, skill, and a healthy dose of uncharacteristic generosity. For years, Boston has been short-paying the contractor, but KE has stuck around because it's a huge contract. Remarkably, the city has recently caught up on years of overdue payments to the security firm along with other contractors. Publicly no one has asked about the origins of or the reasons for the city's sudden influx of cash. I wouldn't be surprised to see quite a few runs aimed at answering those questions. Nor by federal or CorpCourt investigations bringing official heat.

When dealing with KE in Boston, it's important to remember they've modified their standard operating procedures to fit the city. Since Boston overflows with arcane talents, every patrol has a watcher spirit keeping an eye out and ready to call in spiritual or arcane backup. The astral around Boston has a lot of summoned and bound spirits just hanging around who happen to be working for KE. Since arcane talents are so rare, and Awakened personnel are expensive to hire, especially here where recruitment is on overdrive. That means KE often allows students from MIT&T to intern with them to boost their arcane potential. The students get extensive summoning and ritual sorcery practice along with astral surveillance and tracking, but they are still students and usually lack mature judgment and are excessively afraid of social persecution—attributes that skilled runners can exploit.

KE also monitors its patrols with aerial drones cruising or floating above the Metroplex. The dispatchers can reprogram the patrol car's GridGuide to autopilot on the fly reducing response time. This continuous physical and astral monitoring of patrols means response times are significantly faster in Boston than any other city. Something to remember should your run involve engaging Knight Errant.

I'm no Matrix security expert, so I'd ask for those who know to comment on KE's Matrix operations here. Thanks.

- Honestly, they are pretty mild. With the omnipresence of GOD and so many megacorporate assets around town, they don't have a large Matrix division. It's strange, yes, but it is becoming more common. This means two things for the Matrix in Boston. The first is that most minor crimes are pretty easy to get away with on the public grid. Second, it means the Boston grid feels very safe for hackers, so they often let their guard down and forget that cardinal hacking rule: GOD is watching.
- Glitch

- Glitch got most of what I wanted to say. I'll just add that because KE spends so little effort patrolling the Matrix, Boston's megas send a lot of their code-jockeys out there to play and practice their skills. They supply scrubbed decks and let their Matrix assets operate like deckers. Sometimes it's hacking another company or a specific person, sometimes it's hacking themselves as a test. Personally, I find it fun to try to find them and show them what real codeslingers can do!
- Slamm-0!

HARD CORPS SECURITY

While KE plays the conscientious constables of yore on the streets of Boston, Ares' other major security company, Hard Corps, plays hardball behind the walls. Hard Corps is the onsite security for many of Ares' facilities, and when you step onto their land they have no problem reminding you that the dirt you walk on belongs to Ares, not Boston. They don't play nice, they don't pull punches, and they don't trouble fellow Ares subsidiary KE with pesky investigations. They deal with almost everything in house.

Outside of Ares' facilities there aren't many companies that use Hard Corps, but there are a few. Often these companies use the Hard Corp connection to Ares and KE to help hide some of their more illicit business practices. The O'Rilley crime family uses Hard Corp at their more volatile fronts and hires the secmen off the clock to work special overtime hours. This helps keep the guards in their pocket if any kind of KE investigation comes around, and the Hard Corps guys can use their intercorporate relationship to avoid trouble.

- This trick only goes so far. KE really doesn't care about the relationship they have with Hard Corps through Ares because Hard Corps is more like a black-sheep cousin than a brother to the parent megacorp. What they care about is bottom line and bad PR. They will let HC guys walk when the PR would look bad on Ares, but KE has an entire office dedicated to making sure the cost and effort to keep trouble covered up remain acceptable. If they decide the effort to protect any HC or KE officer is excessive, they will still keep the mess out of the public eye, but the company will cut the secmen loose. They usually fire them but if the employee is useful a transfer to the next lower rung—Hard Corps for KE and Wolverine for Hard Corps—is the cost-effective option. If the mess is really bad, or the employee threatens trouble, the company drops a contract to the local shadows.
- Sticks

- Gangers in the sprawl often take these marks as a way to move up in the gang. They get street cred for offing a cop while getting paid to do it.
- /dev/grrl

- A lot of gangers die that way too.
- Sticks

- Fired Hard Corps guys often become muscle for the Mafia families. KE boys often take the big ego hit and slip into the shadows. Be careful working with these guys: More often than not they are looking for a way to get back into the good graces of the sec corp and they just might figure that taking down some runners or bringing in a big case will get them back on the job, so watch out.
- Fianchetto

- Don't totally dismiss the ex-knights. A lot of them leave the company with a serious grudge and no desire to do anything but see their former employers burn.
- Sticks

- The ones who act like they really hate KE are the most dangerous. They will either do stupid shit that gets your team screwed, or they're actually working undercover and will get your team screwed.
- Ma'Fan

The one important thing to remember when dealing with guys (and gals) from Hard Corps is that if they were really intelligent, high-quality security material, they would have been snatched up by KE. Hard Corps is full of the KE mental stability test castoffs.

WOLVERINE SECURITY

Like their feral namesake, these guys are vicious. They don't play well in the Boston style of things, and thus they don't get a lot of contracts, but the ones they do get are going to be hard nuts to crack. Actually the nuts won't be hard to crack but it will explode in your face once you get it open. Since Wolverine is yet another Ares security subsidiary, you would think they get similar treatment to Hard Corps, but that is not the case. KE has zero problem wrecking the rep of Wolverine

because that is the rep Wolverine is expected to have. When a company or individual wants high-end discreet security services or municipal contracts, they contract KE; if they want meaner and more aggressive security, they go with Hard Corps, and if they want a bunch of psychos scaring off or blasting anything that comes near their shit, they hire Wolverine. These guys are meant to be crazy.

Internally, Wolverine actually gets a lot of former KE and Hard Corps guys who have suffered some serious mental and social issues from cyber implantation. In Boston, this means that Wolverine Security usually operates behind closed doors, especially for those officers who have gone the obvious cyber route. Be careful if you find out Wolverine is on a site.

- Interesting thing here is that Boston-savvy runners still need to play it light with these nutballs. Going in and offing every guard in the place sends a message, and not a good one. Unless it's part of the job to make an example, the smart play is the soft play.
- Mihoshi Oni

- That's a funny play with these guys too, since many of them are so off in the head they take runs against them personally. I've known at least two Wolverine guys who spent most of their paychecks hunting down the runners who have hit their sites. They're pretty good at it too.
- Sticks

EAGLE SECURITY

Around the city and surrounding areas, you will find quite a few little pockets of Native American lands that have been bought up by some of the Native American tribes after their western cousins accepted the U.S. deal that abolished all reservations on U.S. soil. Once purchased, the tribes incorporated, and now operate as a corporation. They aren't extraterritorial, but they have hired their own private security force, in this case Eagle Security. When you walk or drive onto many of these little NAN havens, the first thing you may notice is the lack of KE patrols. KE still has jurisdiction, but since Eagle didn't toe their line when it came to investigations and the like, KE left them to fend for themselves. They expected Eagle to fall on its face, but the little Native agency does a great job of keeping trouble at bay and everything under control.

- KE and the UCAS Feds have been making more visits lately as Warpath has ramped up their activities around the region this past year. It's a well-known secret that Warpath operates out of these places and earns the protective silence of Eagle by putting lots of money into the corporate coffers.
- Mika

LONE STAR SECURITY SERVICES

What can anyone say about Lone Star? They have been completely unable to get a foothold in Boston, even doing their best to exploit the repeated stressors on the current contract holder. Everyone knows how entrenched KE is in Boston, but the Star should have been able to do more than get the site contracts for CAS-based firms, some prison operations contracts on the outskirts of the metroplex, and the occasional individual contract to guard someone who prefers to be surrounded by cowboys rather than knights. Sadly, that's what they've managed here, but it has granted some advantages.

Despite their cowboy reputation, most Lone Star officers are well educated, and they almost always work in plainclothes on the streets in Boston. They stay at the top of their game by receiving no less than four weeks of training each year. This goes for everyone from the greeter at the front desk of the Atlantean Foundation to the personal security specialist assigned to The Hill Billy's when they are in town for a music gig. Their operatives here in Boston are often the PR faces you see all over the world.

The other advantage of Lone Star is their lack of connection to Ares and KE or to NeoNET and Minuteman Security. Individuals who don't want the cops or Boston's native megacorp knowing their business can use Lone Star as discreet and legitimate security for operations that might hover on the edge of legality. Small Lone Star security details are a common sight around Boston's docks and warehouse districts.

UNDERWORLD INFO

POSTED BY: FIANCHETTO

Boston is a city rife with criminal history and—like the friendly police officers on whom KE models their public security protocols—a lot of it is fondly remembered as being more charming than it really was. The modern criminal organizations have so smoothly integrated themselves into the fabric of Boston that if you didn't know where to look and what you're looking at you'd never see them. This is partly due to habits learned in the days of the ECSE, when the megacorps invested more than the city government in keeping a lid on crime. Being invisible was a necessary survival skill. It's also partly because Boston's underworld operates under the auspices of a crime syndicate whose long, rich history is filled with loud episodes of mayhem and slaughter separated by long lulls disturbed only by the quiet sounds of kneecap breaking and corpse disposal. There are always groups angling to make some cash,

gain a foothold, hold a neighborhood, defend their beliefs, or just cause trouble, but the ones that last know to stay clear of the big boys.

MAFIA

I could write volumes on this operation, but I need to stick to the highlights. I'll start by saying the Boston Mob is the most territorially successful Mafia organization in the country. Maybe the world. They don't make as much money as some, but they have the firmest control of their turf. They have two primary families in Boston, the O'Rilleys and the Morellis, that don't play nice together.

The O'Rilleys are currently on top, and Don Conor "The Mick" O'Rilley runs things with a smooth blend of old-fashioned mob violence, and a softer, more tactical touch that befits his elven heritage. The biggest threat to the Boston mob has forever been the Boston mob; the Sicilian families and Irish families have never managed to get along. Trying to use one side against the other never works, since they're smart enough to know neither side wins with a deal like that. They'll turn you down and warn the others what you're up to.

Of course, that tradition may all be changing. Damon, the second most famous dragon in Boston, managed to play them against each other long enough to get a lock on the bio-Awakened drug trade. The Commissione had to step in and stop the two families from going to war with Damon. What they really prevented is a war between the Boston mob and a dragon, which a) would not have gone well, and b) would have given local syndicates a golden opportunity to do them harm and make money doing it.

Even though the Commissione stopped the war, others can smell blood in the water. The Boston mob has responded by solidifying operations and strengthening their numbers—including having a stable of trustworthy runners.

Word on the inside is that Morelli has been communicating with some of the other syndicates in town; nothing solid, but there are whispers he might be looking to sell off a little mob control for the top spot in Boston's underworld. If this gets to the Commissione we can expect not only work between the syndicates in town, but also some out-of-town operators looking to take a part in Morelli's double dealing. The worst news for O'Rilley and company is the rumored connection forming between the Morelli family and the Knights of the Red Branch. On the other side, O'Rilley is playing his cards close to his vest, but he has definitely reached out to the local shadow community and is paying good money for milk runs to get some loyalty.

- Problem with that is they are still runners, most of which aren't much better than mercs for hire. They'll go where the money is.
- Rigger-X

- I'll try not to be offended while I point out that real mercs actually stick with their employers. If O'Rilley pays for long-term service from a mercenary unit, he'll get it, so use better terms next time.
- Picador

- Are you saying O'Rilley is hiring your Quadrilla?
- Rigger-X

- How is the view of your colon?
- Picador

- It was a serious question. I have it on good authority than one of the Mafia families has a multi-aspect contract with a merc unit. They answer to Turren, an elf street sammy loyal to the family. Rumor is Turren is using them for his own personal vendetta, and those above him are not too happy at his misuse of resources.
- Rigger-X

YAKUZA

In many cities the Yakuza are the Mafia's biggest rivals, and in some cities they run things and the Mob dances to their tune. Boston is not one of those cities. Here the Yakuza are blocked out of all their traditional fields of endeavor, so they have taken on a new role. In some of the Japanese ethnic neighborhoods they still manage to operate their famous bunraku parlors and gambling dens, but by and large they act as a street-level black-ops branch for MCT. They are well-funded and have access to MCT's asset catalog. That means nice cyber, computech, and magical resources, including some prototype stuff the R&D guys need field tested. The megacorporation even allows them to cross train with their own special operations guys.

This only works because the group is so small, but it definitely means that running against the Yaks in Boston is nothing like running against them anywhere else in the world. They have a tight-knit, well-outfitted, and well-trained operation that looks more like the ninja clans of ancient Japan than a modern crime syndicate.

- That's because they are ninjas. MCT runs wetwork assets for all over the world out of Boston. They just hide out and blend into the hustle and bustle of the NEMA.
- Plan 9

- All my years of operating in the shadows and somehow this little tidbit on a major wetwork syndicate somehow slipped my attention. Why would that be?
- Thorn

- Because you are out of the loop.
- Balladeer

- He actually responded to that. Kids. To all you young folks who have recently joined us, Thorn was being sarcastic. He doesn't know about the MCT Yakuza ninja assassins because they don't exist.
- Mihoshi Oni

- And that makes two.
- Balladeer

SEOULPA RINGS

The Koreans, like the Japanese Yakuza, and the Chinese Triads, see their ethnic heritage as the foundation of their organization and—like the Yakuza and Triads—pretty much stick to their own neighborhoods. Luckily for them, while America has always styled itself as a melting pot, Boston was always a stew pot—filled with one of those thick stews you could eat with a fork, but you can still tell the carrots, celery, and soybeef chunks apart. Boston is very good at binding everyone together while keeping folks separate. These localized pockets of cultural integrity become microcosms where everything one needs to live within their cultural norms is always nearby. On the outskirts of these cultural enclaves you'll find buffer zones, where outsiders are allowed to participate in their culture—art, food, whatever—while feeding cash into the community's economy. These zones are the first line of defense against incursion, and harder to get past than you might think.

The Seoulpa Rings make up the gangs, peacekeepers, and security forces of the Korean communities. Inside their cultural sphere, away from outsiders, they act like typical street thugs and gangbangers trying to defend their respective turfs and make names for themselves. In the buffer zones, where their culture is on display to outsiders, they act like a citizens' safety patrol—nabbing petty thieves, breaking up fights, making vandals undo whatever they've done, and so on. No gang business gets carried into the tourist markets; aside from competitions to see who does the best job of putting down trouble, they coordinate well enough to act as a unified police force. The point being—and you'll see this repeated in every ethnic community—don't count on being able to exploit gang rivalries. When it comes to defending their culture or their community against outsiders, individual agendas are put on hold.

- That is a remarkably simplified version of the complex interactions between these gangs and the culture within and around their little sections of the metroplex. It wasn't mentioned explicitly that they have more than one Korean neighborhood within the metroplex, and that these neighborhoods are often at war with each other, or that they use their local Seoulpa Rings to fight their battles.
- Ma'Fan

- The Tae Kwon Ring is currently the toughest group in the 'plex. Their territory near South Boston, just over 93 from Irishville, is prime 'plex real estate and close to the Hub. They've been a target for other gangs since they took almost complete control of their neighborhood in '72.
- Mihoshi Oni

TRIADS

In most cities where they have a presence, the third of the Asian ethnic syndicates, the Triads, or Tong Gangs, normally control smuggling, especially the BADs. But Boston (wait for it) is different. First, Damon runs the BAD business—and if a dragon weren't enough to keep them in check, he's running it in partnership with Wuxing—a Chinese megacorp with connections to some apex predators in the underworld's global food chain.

With no sphere of criminal activity under their control, the Triads in Boston, and all over the NEMA, have specialized. Each Triad gang works a different enterprise such as drugs, human trafficking, prostitution, gambling, etc. They keep their operations small enough that the Mob is willing to overlook them but profitable enough to be worth the risks. That means providing things and services that aren't on most organizations' standard menu.

- The Yellow Lotus and Black Orchid clans are the two largest and are currently at war with each other over some sort of family spat. Not unlike the tale of Romeo and Juliet, except these guys are settling their differences with machine pistols. The trouble is getting louder than would usually be tolerated in Boston, but no one has stepped forward to settle things.
- Southie

- That's because there's no universal peacekeeper. Boston operates on a giant gentlemen's agreement. If someone doesn't want to be a gentleman, then there is no megacorporate overwatch coming to hammer them like there used to be. We'll see how this plays out and if it changes Boston's status quo.
- DangerSensei

- It hasn't before. I don't think it would have. But the truth is, with all that's happened and is happening, nothing will ever be the same in Boston.
- Southie

VORY V ZAKONE

With such a diverse and divided immigrant culture, Boston was bound to eventually grow its own little branch of the Krasnaya mafiya (Red Mafia). The reason it had taken so long was two-fold: Most obvious was the massive gap between how the Vory operate and

how the shadows in Boston work. Less obvious (from the outside) were the corporations. When the ECSE was in town, Boston's discreet shadowculture was ideal for creating the illusion of a law-abiding, industrious city with the best interests of everyone at heart. The corporations loved it, and not just because it was good PR for attracting investors and opening doors. Tranquil-on-the-surface Boston allayed the suspicions of investigative and enforcement agencies unfamiliar with the reality—encouraging less intense scrutiny and the benefit of the doubt. Whenever the Vory tried to bring their violent and bloody ways to Boston, it wasn't the local gangs but the corporations that dropped the hammer on them.

Of course, that changed after the Crash of '64. When the ECSE moved back south, the corps lost interest in keeping up appearances or expending their resources keeping a lid on the shadows. It didn't take long before there was an increase in "loud" operations. Nothing on the level of chaos that Seattle (or heaven forbid, L.A). sees, but more than the Boston of 2063. So naturally the Vory tested the new shadows. When their first explorers weren't crushed, the Vory found a local market for imported "private service" workers and established a foothold.

This is where the Mob and other crime syndicates screwed up. They were so used to the corporations hammering the Vory that they didn't consider them a serious threat until the Vory started hammering them. Often literally. Violent and brutal, the Vory convinced enough competitors that the prize was not worth the body count and took control of the high-end prostitution market on the waterfront, then diversified into importing guns and drugs.

But the Vory didn't become major players in Boston until they found their perfect niche: Matrix crime. The Vory took to the wireless revolution like it was their idea and rapidly made themselves the ones to see for anything involving the Matrix. Cracked programs, new programs, datasteals, contract hackers, custom links, whatever you could think of; they were the illegal source to see first. They were one of the first to get their hands on the new cyberdecks earlier this year, and no one has heard any complaints from them about the new protocols.

If you're working for or against the Vory, remember they have a very militaristic operation and a mean streak wider than a happy dragon's grin. They don't mind operations carrying an extra helping of violence and often request it that way to send a message, so Vory work is not for the squeamish. (And no, the irony of an outfit that goes out of its way to get its hands bloody specializing in Matrix crime is lost on no one.) A word of warning though: If the Vory hire you for a run and ask you to keep it quiet, do not mess up. Because that means whomever they are sending you against scares even the Vory.

- If you want a message to get to the Vory, drop it at Legit's Weapons in the Catacombs. Legit—that's the owner's name—has ties back to Mother Russia and helps get people in touch with his countrymen. For a price.
- Red Anya

KNIGHTS OF THE RED BRANCH

There are two major groups in Boston whose names start with Knights, and these are the ones you don't want to run into if you're an elf. The other one you don't want to run into at all, but we'll get to them later. The KRB are, for the most part, Irish immigrants who left, fled, or were forced out of Ireland when it became Tír na nÓg. They have a serious angst issue with elves as a whole. It's the typical story of racism, except these guys went all terrorist organization for a while and got hammered back in 2061. What's left has calmed a bit, or at least gotten less public about the rotten drek they pull.

All over the metroplex these guys are one hundred percent pure trouble. There are few cases where they won't outright attack an elf on sight, and absolutely no cases where some form of verbal assault doesn't occur. They are great at provoking trouble and remarkably hard to provoke in return, as they usually play the "oh shit, it can talk" card over and over.

At least that's how their street-level members work. Up the ranks of knighthood, you will find that the group is well funded and well connected in Boston and around the world. Due to their massive hatred for elves, they have friends and contacts in other powerful societies of hate such as the Human Nation and the Black Lodge, as well as rumored connections to Ordo Maximus. That's three very powerful secret societies all linked by what most folks think of as a bunch of elf-hating street toughs. Whenever you deal with these guys, make sure to dig a little deeper and see which faction you might be really working for. Know whom you're getting involved with before you go all in.

- Parts of the KRB have been getting hit by forces connected by varying degrees to dragons because of ties to the Human Nation and Black Lodge, two groups the dragons have been busily settling scores with recently.
- Frosty

- Good riddance to bad rubbish.
- Haze

WARPATH

These guys are angry Indians—sorry, Native Americans—looking to settle scores that are anywhere from one hour to a thousand and seventy-six years old. With all the big troubles rocking Boston over the years, most folks don't pay attention to groups as small as Warpath, but they've

had a long and generally successful career of targeted terrorist acts trying to get the UCAS to give the eastern tribes their land back. They've never gotten a lick of land, but for years they gained the respect and sometimes fear of those who were aware of them. Unfortunately for them, that all went down the tubes when Winternight set them up as patsies. Warpath thought they were taking part in a coordinated effort to bring back simpler times and a more natural lifestyle—what they were really doing was providing the diversions Winternight needed to be able to pull off their big EMP plan. Result? The second Crash, which reduced Warpath to just another psycho terrorist group in the minds of the public and law enforcement.

- Many of the Warpath members who were tricked into being involved with this have formed their own little sect called the Lief-Killers. They focus their efforts on going after known members of Winternight. The small group has also attracted members of some tribes with land in Newfoundland who still blame Lief Ericsson for starting the whole mess of European invasion.
- Mika

Since then they have changed their operations a little in the NEMA area. They are extremely leery of working with any other groups, even well-known organizations like TerraFirst!. They aren't looking to connect with any failed or unfocused operations. They've moved past their flirtation with any kind of back-to-nature agenda and gotten back to their original mission to get back sacred tribal lands.

They've also abandoned their old sabotage-and-demands tactics in favor of a more modern and effective strategy. I'm not saying they don't blow things up any more—that still happens when necessary—but for the most part they're using more subtle psychological weapons. They decrease the value of a piece of historically sacred property by increasing the crime rate in the area, elevating the radon levels, polluting the ground or water, and the ever-popular scare campaign involving restless spirits and curses. Eventually the property values drop to the point where tribal corporations can afford to buy the sacred land—and that's what they do. The whole thing is illegal and unfair to the honest folk who didn't know their homes or businesses were on sacred ground, but it's better than, say, flattening a special-needs school.

- Seems pretty lame for a group called Warpath. They should rebrand themselves as Landscammers.
- Sticks

- You may be kidding, but there is a schism forming. Many feel their new path is too similar to what the white man did to their people, and that the organization should stay true to its violent beginnings.
- Mika

- How's that any different than what the "white man" did? And how many of them still refer to their enemies as the "white man"?
- Sticks

- Good point. And too many.
- Mika

TECHNICOLOR WINGS

As a major seaport with a tight rein on criminal enterprises and extensive control over the movement of ships, trains, and flights through the city, Boston is the perfect place for smugglers. Organizational control means there is a system behind that organization, and a system means something that can be manipulated with predictable results. Technicolor Wings knows just how to manipulate that system and move all sorts of illegal products through the port and all over the world.

The branch in Boston is led by a dwarf named Elbrun Cornich, known in the shadows as Rubix. Elbrun is one of five Boston Transit Supervisors who oversee and coordinate all three of Boston's transportation systems. He's in an ideal spot to help his organization move products while at the same time limiting the opportunities of his opposition. Rubix pretty much got out of the hands-on aspects of his business after a bus crushed his pelvis while he was "checking" the GridGuide transponder; he can't afford the surgeries needed to get him as mobile as he would need to be. There are a dozen skilled local riggers loyal to the Wings who do all of the physical and mobile for him. If you can't get a connection with Rubix directly, those are the guys to know in the Boston smuggling arena.

- Rubix is definitely on the inside. He hasn't been on the smuggler scene in months, not to mention he isn't exactly the sneakiest or fastest smuggler around these days. Though if something is going to move out of the QZ, it'll probably come through him.
- Rigger X

- The Wings are all over the border of the quarantine, looking for a way in. From the rumors I've heard, a few have jumped the wall. Since no word has come out, though, we don't know if they made it or just got blown to smithereens on the way in.
- Sounder

GANGS

The gang scene in Boston is constantly changing, so don't count on this datadump. Do some research before you hit the streets or you might find yourself in a world of grief. That being said, I think I can safely discuss the Ancients, Mama's Boyz, the Hellriders, Bane-Sidhe,

the Roxx, and the Wicked. After the ECSE left, NeoNET kept things from going totally buckwild, but those in the lowest level of organized crime have taken the little bit of slack they were given and run with it. For the most part the gangs stick to the Rox, the Wilds, South Boston, or the Catacombs, but that doesn't mean they don't sometimes get it into their heads to roll into, or through, the Hub.

- A few slick runners throw on some gang colors whenever they do any loud operations around town. It works more often than not. Downside of this strategy is no gang likes to take the heat for our work. Their standard response to an outsider wearing their colors is to hunt that person down and give them the initiation they forgot they had to go through to don the colors. Some of them are getting good at finding runners.
- Southie

ANCIENTS

(LEADER: LUCKY LIAM; COLORS: GREEN AND BLACK)

Most people have heard of the Ancients, not just those of us in the shadows. The Ancients are one of the most popular gangs in the world and have sects all over North America. They get glamorized a lot. Everyone knows the image of the beautiful elf in leathers cruising the highways, his windblown silver hair matching the chrome bustier of the hot female elf with unnaturally long legs riding the back saddle in tiny shorts. Total drek. Real life is scarred bodies in full bike-racing armor (at the least) riding bikes built for battle, not beauty.

The Boston chapter of the Ancients is relatively small; the narrow winding streets of the rough neighborhoods limit the opportunities to employ their flashy high-speed tactics. The Ancients do a pretty good job of keeping their violence from affecting the corporate operations in the city. They'd have people believe that's out of respect for the Boston tradition, but everyone knows they're just staying off the big boys' radar (don't say that to them in those terms, though). Look for them operating as protection for shipments running up and down I-95 and I-93 as well as some moving through the subway lines of the T. Yep, motorcycles underground escorting a train. Rock and roll.

The extent of their home turf varies, like everyone else's, but it's centered around Kustom Rode Bykes on the west side of the Rox. The name of the shop, or rather its initials, are meant to disrespect the Knights of the Red Branch. Bloody altercations between the Ancients and the KRB and Bane-Sidhe are pretty common. The Ancients' numbers might be limited, but their experience is abundant.

Lucky Liam heads the local chapter of the Ancients right now, but he has only held the position for a few months. He's looking to build a stronger cultural connection with some of his Irish roots but is hampered somewhat by the Ancients' frequent clashes with the KRB and Bane-Sidhe. Rumors have a deal building with Don O'Rilley, but those are two elves who have never gotten along—Liam dated O'Rilley's eldest daughter in his younger days, and to say the Don didn't approve of the relationship is putting it very lightly.

- Rumors have the two still being an on-and-off item but unable to maintain the relationship and unwilling to go the Romeo-and-Juliet route.
- Southie

BANE-SIDHE

(LEADER: FAOLIN, COLORS: GREEN, ORANGE, AND WHITE)

The Ancients are righteously pretentious racist pricks, but the Bane-Sidhe make them look mild. The gang is predominantly Irish and only has one racial restriction: no elves. They will go out of their way to beat, and often kill, elves that take a wrong turn and wander into their section of South Boston.

The gang is well known to be errand boys for the KRB, and many of the members of the gang share their allegiance with the anti-elf terrorist organization. In recent years the gang has been mobilizing but not in your traditional, go-gangers on bikes pattern. Instead they use armored vehicles—former cop cars, bank trucks, and everything in between. There has been an increasing number of clashes with the Ancients and a three-way fight to be kings of the road.

Faolin (Gaelic for wolf) is the current leader of the Bane-Sidhe. She's a bestial-looking ork who speaks with a horrible accent that's made worse by her tusks. I refer to Faolin as "she," but even those who have seen her might have a hard time determining her physical gender. She was born, though, as Meaghan Whelan, and labeled as female. Most gangs are male-dominated, but when I said Faolin is bestial, I meant she is massively muscled, even by ork standards. Simply put, she is as strong as any ork, regardless of gender. Faolin rules the Bane-Sidhe with an iron fist, and the gang has grown under her leadership.

- I know Meaghan Whelan—or at least, I *knew* her. Her family came over back when the nÓg formed and kept mostly to themselves in South Boston. When Meaghan was old enough to go to school, no one could understand her speech, and they assumed she couldn't understand them. Some pretty awful things were said to her and about her by people who thought she was too simple-minded to comprehend. She worked with her family on the docks and got real big, real fast. When she was sixteen she went back to her first-grade teacher, who'd been particularly abusive to the little girl she'd thought was too stupid to understand, said something to her in that thick

accent and collapsed the woman's upper palate with her bare fist. Before anyone claims street rumor, I'll lay it out that it's fact. I was one of the few Southie tuskers who understood her, and we were friends back then.

It's also good to point out that her daughter is a shadowrunner, going by the street name SheDog. She's only sixteen but already a quite capable Wolf shaman who runs with a crew out of Boston. The two aren't close, but they both were raised under South Boston rules.

- Southie

MAMA'S BOYZ

(LEADER: MAMA?; COLORS: NONE)

This "gang" isn't all about turf wars and making sure everyone respects their colors. This is probably because they control all of their turf and they don't have colors. They just get respect. The gang is composed mostly of orks and trolls but also has a number of other metavarients in the mix that call the Catacombs home. The entire expanse of the Catacombs is considered Mama's Boyz turf, though they don't get into turf wars. When an outsider slips into the Catacombs to do some work, they simply send a few members over to explain what percentage of whatever the action is that must be paid to Mama's Boyz. Pay and all's chill until next month. Refuse and don't go to sleep, because sometime in the next thirty-six hours you will be evicted or eviscerated. The attack is often performed by Mama's inner-circle lieutenants, who were once rumored to be ghouls. It's not a rumor anymore. They are.

The gang deals in goods and transportation. The Catacombs can get just about anything, anywhere, without anyone the wiser. I've heard that Mama operates her own private rail car that she moves around the Catacombs instead of settling in one place. Just a rumor mind you, but it certainly helps to explain why no one, anywhere in the Catacombs, can give you any clue as to where to find her.

- There are a few private railcars that cruise the T system as well as the decommissioned rails throughout the Catacombs. One of them might be Mama's. But don't go trying to find out, because most of those private cars belong to corporate bigwigs who need a secure spot for extracurricular activities. Sticking your nose in the wrong place will get it cut off.
- Southie

Mama is more of a fixer than a gang leader. There hasn't been a confirmed sighting of her in years, and some question—not too loudly—whether she is still around. Her network operates and her gangers defend her name and her honor like she's right there cracking a whip on them, but she avoids the public.

THE ROXX

(LEADER: BLACKROCK; COLORS: RED AND BROWN)

If you love the idea of the Mafia-life and dream of being a "made man" but your family isn't named Morelli, Muldoon, or O'Rilley and you don't have any other ins, you can join up with the Roxx and work your way up. Or so the members of the Roxx think.

The truth is Don O'Rilley uses the gang to handle operations like prostitution and drugs while avoiding any connection to his organization. The gangers think they're like junior mafiosi, and the real Mafia keeps getting the cash flow without the headache of dealing with punk-ass kids and Knight Errant raids.

The gang's current leader, Joseph "Blackrock" Murphy, is a dwarf mutt of Irish and Italian ancestry who fashions himself as the force who will someday unify the Mafia families in Boston. He earned the gang with smarts more than brawn: He jammed up the previous leader, Two-Time, with proof that he was ratting on the mob to avoid time way back in the early '60s. He helped the gang get through the insanity of the Crash, not that it greatly affected their turf in the Rox, but it wasn't an easy time for anyone. He's held the top spot for over a decade now, and the gang is currently stronger than ever.

WICKED

(LEADER: FRATELLI, COLORS: PURPLE AND BLACK)

These assholes are drek-nuts crazy. They give gangs in Boston a bad name. They all talk with a ridiculously exaggerated Boston accent (so over the top you'd think it was a parody, but they're quite serious) and consider themselves an evolution of the urban tribes. Instead of staking a claim to one spot, they are nomadic, but not normal street-strolling nomads. No, these wackos are urban runners, students of "paircoohr," as they say it. They're roof-runners, highly mobile even when the streets are blocked. They run all over the Rox and have numerous "dropzones," as they call their crashpads. All of them are strange, out-of-the-way spots that the gang has made their own by removing normal stairwells and ladders. This means only someone who is a skilled climber—or "traceur," as practitioners of parkour call themselves—can get to their elevated boltholes.

The Wicked aren't so much a gang as a culture. There are a bunch of Wicked gangs, called "packs," that follow the same philosophies and share the same crashpads but may or may not back each other up when the chips are down. They often won't. The members of a pack are loyal to each other, and for the most part while all packs give the courtesy of listening to Fratelli, the Wicked leader, they don't take directions from anyone.

As for what they do—well, you got me. They're often contracted as urban couriers, but only a few of them have the sense of focus to stay on task for long enough

to deliver something. They seem to have loose connections to local neo-anarchists, but it's mostly superficial. Members of the gang have been seen hanging with registered S-K SINners whose parents are working for Siemens, but that could just be youthful idolization of their freewheeling lifestyle.

The group doesn't seem to need a lot of money and lives a pretty impoverished life. Many of them have even ignored the ubiquitous commlink trend and function without them most of the time. The one thing the gang gathers money for is cyber and bioware. The members seem to function as a commune, where each member takes their turn at going under the knife. Most go for the most expensive thing they can afford that will help their "art," but some choose to pass on their turn, or get something useful but not expensive. They have a strange respect for each other, and making unselfish decisions like that increases a member's status or karma or whatever it is that's important to them.

- Most of those who pass on their augments are adepts. There is at least one pack that is all adepts, and they have developed a different way to spend their cash and augment their abilities using tattoo magic. I don't understand how it works, as I ain't no spellslinger, but they're sometimes talkative and have half-explained the basics to me. To wit: Tattoos lock magical power into their bodies. Told you it was basic.
- Southie

- Basic but accurate.
- Arete

- Thanks.
- Southie

Word on the street is that Fratelli, the leader of all the Wicked packs, is a strange fellow. He speaks with the same accent as the rest, but everything he says seems to be in the form of convoluted riddles, or maybe rhetorical questions, and he never speaks to anyone directly. More like he's talking to the air, or the room, and everyone is supposed to know when he is directing things at them. Despite this strange behavior, he is the one Wicked member focused enough to function as a courier, and he always seems to know what's going on within the gang—which is why most of them listen to him. He's a very lithe and agile elf with a few bio-augmentations and some nanoware. Yes, that means possible CFD infection, but he's been as strange as Plan 9 for as long as I've heard of him, so maybe he found a way to deal with the problem like Plan 9 did.

- I'm not sure how I should take that.
- Plan 9

- A compliment. You're not so bad for a body-stealing AI inside the body and mind of a whacked-out, augmentation-addicted conspiracy theorist.
- Fianchetto

- Thanks
- Plan 9

HELLRIDERS

(LEADER: WYATT, COLORS: RED, ORANGE, YELLOW, BLACK, AND FLAMES)

To Hell and Back, Over and Over. That's the motto of the Hellriders. They are the third force looking to rule the roads of Boston. The gang is one of the most open in Boston. They don't care who or what you are; as long as you're willing to give your life to the gang, you can be a Hellrider. And the first thing you need to do to join is die!

The gang initiation for every rider is to ride to hell and back, which means to open up the throttle and slam full on into something, preferably an Ancient or Bane-Sidhe, but anything will do. Initiates survive, die, or never ride again. If the rider survives the crash and is willing to get back on a bike, they're in (once they've recovered from all their injuries of course). Only the craziest of the crazy play chicken with a Hellrider.

The gang makes a lot of money putting that no-fear attitude to good use. They'll do heists, vehicular terrorism, and take just about any crazy job that involves riding on a motorcycle. They're also one of Damon's main BAD distributors outside of his clubs. That unlikely relationship came about when Damon tried to get his thrills by riding against a Hellrider by the name of Pluto. Pluto didn't back down, or flinch, and their bikes went head-on over the Quarry Bridge out near Quincy. Pluto went over the side of the bridge, so Damon took dragon form (rare for him) and flew down to catch Pluto just before he hit the bottom. He's had respect for the gang—and them for him—ever since.

In fact, Wyatt, the leader of the Hellriders, rides a custom rebuilt vintage 2008 Hyabusa Damon gave him. He only rides it for show, of course. His working ride is his custom Scorpion that looks like a tank on two wheels but fits his bulky ork frame better than the vintage racing bike.

- Rumor has it Wyatt is afraid of the Hyabusa. The Scorpion tops out shy of 200 kph. The Hyabusa can do that in second gear; run flat out can hit 440 kph!!! The bike is ridiculous fast and even Wyatt, with all his crash-induced head traumas, knows that crashes at that speed ain't no joke.
- Southie

THE CENTURIONS

(LEADER: CAESAR, COLORS: RED, PURPLE, BLACK, AND WHITE)

Rumor is the guy calling himself Caesar was a decorated special-forces officer with either the UCAS or CAS who got himself discharged for conduct unbecoming. Details vary, but in general the issue was his brutal tactics, harsh treatment of captured enemy combatants, and extreme, even abusive, discipline of his own men. Whether or not any of that's true doesn't matter so much as the fact Caesar is now the founder and self-appointed leader of a new street gang called the Centurions.

Caesar's inner circle and personal security force is a close-knit group he calls the Praetorians. All of them are highly proficient in all forms of armed and unarmed mayhem—in fact their combat skills lend credence to rumors about their leader's origins. It's easy to picture them as members of a rogue special forces unit. The Centurions billed themselves as a mercenary company when they first arrived in Boston, but once they got a feel for the playing field they took over a chunk of the Rox and converted from mercs to gangers. The speed with which they established their rep and carved out their territory seems unbelievable until you take a moment to imagine highly trained and disciplined gangers with military-grade weapons and combat experience. Until recently the only limit to their reach has been their limited numbers (and the intelligence not to grab more than they can hold). That's changing. They've begun accepting new members, bringing in any ex-military or security personnel who can pass their entrance exam. Rumors that it's nearly impossible to survive the exam are probably generated to keep pretenders and wannabes from even trying. The Centurions are trained to fight individually or as part of larger groups. When they attack in force, their main body closes rapidly, engaging even armed opponents hand-to-hand, while snipers on high provide effective and mobile ranged support. Their chariot-like tadpole trikes are well armed and used in flanking attacks like cavalry of old.

Caesar took a large amount (in gang terms) of territory in the Rox, and rival gangs are very aware of the Centurions' growth, but there's not a whole lot they can do about it. Caesar understands the hearts-and minds-principle of keeping a populace happy—the area they control is crime-free and better provisioned than other neighborhoods—and his gang operates without interference. The Centurions are into gun running, prostitution, gambling, drug production and supply, and just about every other kind of illegal activity, but they engage in these activities without bringing negative impacts on the community. In fact many of the people living in the gang's territory see them as quasi protectors or godfather-like figures, and as a result the gang has eyes and ears everywhere. Caesar fiercely protects the populace of his territories and offers a wide variety of generous rewards for those who "faithfully serve the empire," while at the same time bringing his legendary harsh punishments down on those who act against his interests.

The Centurions took over the former Roxbury Sportsplex, which they now call the Coliseum, and have begun presenting non-lethal combat games based on ancient gladiatorial events. These games are free to the public and, whether intended or not (I lean towards intended), serve several purposes. They showcase the power of the gang and the fighting prowess of its members to the general populace while providing vital and varied training exercises for the fighters. The games also include open events in which non-Centurions compete against Centurions. These contests have become part of their recruitment process; anyone seeking to join the gang who does not have a proven military record must participate. If the outsider bests a Centurion, they are given an opportunity to earn membership. Caesar also uses the Coliseum to showcase the culture of his Empire. In addition to the non-lethal games there are lethal duels of honor and physical punishment of criminals (Including executions for serious offenses) to remind the citizens who is in charge and why.

- Caesar is truly serious about his security. The Praetorians are nasty, and a half dozen of them are augmented trolls. The background tale is true and vetted by several locals who have snagged the personnel files of various members of the Praetorians, all former special operations, most CAS, but some UCAS and corporate.
- Southie

- I'm linking up another piece here on urban tribes because I don't see it anywhere else, and they deserve to be mentioned.
- Southie

URBAN TRIBES

Similar to gangs but different enough to warrant a section all their own, urban tribes are communal groups living in the urban jungle of the Rox. They don't operate as criminal syndicates, and most tribes don't even operate together, but they don't hesitate to commit crimes when it comes to their survival or the protection of their homes. Laws mean little to them. Their names are themselves usually based on geography or cultural connection. For example, the Graystones live in Graystone, a former old folks home, the Netwalkers are Matrix savvy techheads that include some technomancers in their ranks, and the Firbolg are all trolls.

The tribes all live in rundown and abandoned buildings that they've fixed up and turned into labyrinthine dens designed to keep out the unwanted. Visitors, which are rare, are often blindfolded or placed under the influence of a confusion spell while they are led into the inner sanctum of the urban tribes. Tribal dens that end

up in a particular gang's turf will often cause temporary tension between the groups until the gang realizes that urban tribes are not another gang and are not after territory—they are simply defending their homes, similar to a bear defending its den. And if they don't come to that realization peacefully, some tribes are capable of demonstrating surprising and dangerous strength. Urban legends around the tribes of Boston abound.

- Example: On Emmonsdale Road there is an old church that was claimed by the Gorgons. The same church eventually fell into the turf of the Chrome Dragons, a small local gang with big plans. The CDs didn't want the tribe on their turf, so when they caught members of the tribe out foraging, they stripped them to the skin, spray-painted them completely silver, and sent them back to the tribe with the message to "get out."

  Two days later there were no Chrome Dragons left alive. They all died from asphyxiation—their noses, mouths and even lungs filled with silver spray paint. Not all urban tribes are that deadly violent, but you'll never know until they act. Best to never test them.
- Southie

The urban tribes are very spiritual, and all of their members reportedly commune with the spirits of the city. Many urban shamans live among the tribes and some tribes follow a specific spirit of the city. Shamans in the gang often follow Rat, Dog, Cat, or other urban animals, but their traditions come from a mishmash of influences, including Celtic, Greek, Roman, Amerind, Gaelic, Norse, Wiccan, Vodoun, Christian, and just about any other from the history, even the fictional history, of man.

The tribes survive by scavenging through the city garbage that is dumped into the Rox every day. They come up with some sweet finds, and many operate shops near their homes or bring saleable items to the local bazaars. Though the urban tribe philosophy or spirituality shuns the trappings of twenty-first century technology, a few tribes are willing to compromise to the point of listing their wares daily on the public grid with reservations taken on items paid for in advance.

In general the urban tribes can be trusted as good sources for both gear and a place to hide. But be careful not to violate their rules, wear out your welcome, or bring serious heat down on the tribe—the consequences for these transgressions can be severe.

- Interesting that the neo-anarchists weren't included. They're pretty active here trying to bring down the new Matrix at its core. They're scattered and disorganized, but at least one group, the Price of Liberty, fights under the banner of neo-anarchy and has been making a name for itself in the area. They're heavy into recruiting runners, especially teams with solid hackers, but they don't trust and rarely hire independent hackers. The group also puts a lot of effort into keeping its distance from technomancers for some reason.
- Aufheben

MAGICAL BEANTOWN

POSTED BY: WINTERHAWK

I hope you did not skip straight to this section in hopes of gaining arcane insights or taking a quick astral jaunt over to Boston. There are few things less pleasant than being violently pummeled in the astral by spirits under orders to keep everyone out. I am waiting for the triumvirate's revelations just as you are, but for now let me bring you up to speed on Boston's mystical side.

According to Anglo historians, the settlement of Boston is almost 450 years old. If you ask a tribal historian, one of the native peoples who watched the big ships arrive, you'll get a history that goes back "thousands of moons." It's this history, often distant and imperfectly perceived, that most shapes the mana and magic of Boston. Native magic is still strong here. Despite the settlement and modernization, nature magic followers find that Boston and its surrounding towns and lands remain friendly to much of their magic. Now, many of those who know magic also know that it is not true everywhere. The harbor is still polluted, both physically and astrally, and the heights of the Financial District are as far from the touch of nature's magic as the antennae that top their buildings are from their lowest foundation.

However, on the ground, and beneath it, Boston still feels the touch of nature. Much of this is the influence of Salem, and its revitalization of nature magic in New England. But to an equal extent the Bostonian attitude, the mindfulness that no matter where an individual came from they were brought here and remain at the whims of nature. As the first settlers faced New England's winds, storms, bitter cold winters, and the unpredictable highs and lows of the summer months, they came to respect the natural forces around them. At a fundamental level Boston's modern residents still harbor that respect for Mother Nature and the hell she can bring down on Boston.

In modern Boston, that connection to nature is very well balanced with a powerful hermetic following. This is especially true among the academics attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology & Thaumaturgy (MIT&T) and Harvard. It's also evident with the massive number of mental adepts that attend those schools and reside in Boston. The studies being done over at MIT&T, and the business, law, and logistics advances coming from Harvard, are often the early-morning readings of headhunters and megacorporate VPs looking for the next stud to add to their stable. The close knit, yet widely

A REPORT ON GATEWAY TRANSPORTATION

MIT&T's newest thaumaturgical ace, Dr. Dyna Might, has done it yet again. Yesterday's unveiling of the Salem-Lab 620 Gateway has everyone seeing instantaneous transportation in the near future. The Salem 620, as it has already been dubbed, is a pair of very special astral gateways, one geomasonic and one geomantic, that have been tuned to the same metaplane. Travelers participate in the ritual at the originating gateway, then step through the portal and step out on the other side.

Dr. Might was kind enough to answer questions during the announcement and demonstration ceremony, where she herself began the meeting via the Matrix from Lab 620, and stepped out the Salem arch to the awaiting press. Here are the highlights from the Q&A.

How do people move from one gate to another?

They walk. There are four gates total. Two here on our metaplane, and two on another. The two on the other aren't like ours. They are always active, fueled by the local mana, and nearly touching. When a traveler steps through a gateway here, they are actually stepping through this one, and out through one on the metaplane, then back into one on the metaplane, and then out our second one, all in a single step.

What metaplane are travelers moving through?

Thystonius. But the location of the metaplane is moot, as you only spend a fraction of a second there.

Are the gates safe on this other metaplane, Thystonius?

They are. Actually the gates were constructed, then encased in a solid structure that was built around them on that metaplane.

Others have claimed that astral travel of a physical nature is impossible. How is it you've managed this?

Hard work and perseverance. That, and I don't listen to what other people say. I've experienced physical travel to another metaplane, so I knew it was possible, I just had to figure out the logistics. When I was young my father disappeared from a Mitsuhama lab while studying metaplanar travel. Twenty years later I recreated his work, found him, and returned safely. After that, it was a straightforward process of combining my father's work with what I had learned in the search for him with some other arcane practices. It wasn't a quick or easy process, but it was doable. Obviously, since here we are.

What are the dangers of this type of travel?

Tripping. (crowd laughter) No, seriously, there are none. Any errors in the initiation ritual prevent the gate from opening at all. When it does open we always send a mockingbird through first and get Matrix verification of the arrival on the other side.

Can travelers get lost on some other metaplane?

As I said. There are no dangers. That would be a danger.

Will this be expanded to other locations?

Possibly, but not quickly. The gates are difficult to construct and must be located at precise points determined by multiple parameters; pairs of gates must be aligned perfectly to very exacting specifications unique to their relative positions to function properly. I will say this is not the only set we have developed or are working on, but this is not a process that can be hurried. You can expect to see more sites around the world, but gradually. Gateways are not likely to replace other modes of long distance travel any time soon.

- No danger, bullshit. There is no way this stuff is totally safe. Anyone got the inside scoop on the R&D behind this? How many people did they lose while testing it?
- Jimmy No

- A few. From what I know, the travel may not be dangerous, but the building process is. They have to build a gateway and travel to the other side. Once there they need to construct another gateway connected to the Earth metaplane from scratch using local materials and rules of arcana. Quite a few of their test gates lead to some unpleasant places. Teams have been lost trying to hold the gateway location during the arcane construction process. A few teams have been lost completely when return contact with the metaplane could not be established. Fun.
- Ethernaut

- The expectation that metaplanes bow to our concepts of physics and consistency is the first step on a tangled pathway of madness.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- Didn't anyone take the good doctor's name as a sign that this whole thing might be bulldrek?
- Frosty

varied magical community in Boston attracts recruiters from all the major corporations as a rich source of prospective employees.

Moving beyond the schoolchildren, let's look at the corporations that take the academic studies, hypotheses, and models off campus to test them in the field. Boston may be best known as the hometown of corporate shark Richard Villiers and his kin, and thus connected to NeoNET, but beneath that megacorporate umbrella you also have Manadyne, a far more respected and feared name in the magical communities than Villiers. Along with Manadyne, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies has a lot of resources around Beantown. Wuxing has a presence here, and they actively study the city's geomantic strength and the manaline that runs from Salem. Saeder-Krupp seems primarily here only to keep an eye on NeoNET, but you can never trust how things seem. Arcana has a habitat on the edge of the harbor, and Ares has solid presence just about everywhere thanks to their many arcane research projects in conjunction with MIT&T. This is a short list of the major players. Every single megacorporation has some assets working in this town, but I don't have enough time to list them all.

The biggest name in magic in Boston is Manadyne. They are headquartered here, have one of the largest labs at MIT&T, and own no less than six warehousing and production facilities along Route 128 where they make and store most of the manatech they create. Most people know that Manadyne is a wholly owned subsidiary of NeoNET, but it falls into the portfolio and purview of Villiers, not Celedyr as one might expect. This means operations of a nature compatible with our moral flexibility are often contracted by NeoNET against Manadyne. The normal shell games are played to hide all of this, but it happens far more often than people imagine.

- At least four of those facilities are now inside the QZ and no doubt are—or will be—high-priority targets.
- Hard Exit

Manadyne's interests and assets in this region are not limited to the city proper. The corporation also has research and data storage facilities in the smaller towns and cities all around Boston. Rumors even speak of off-the-books testing facilities out in the Rox and the Wilds. The lack of consistent law enforcement in these areas allows for some unorthodox research studies to take place, so I'm not doubting the rumor. Many of their secondary facilities do not have corporate labels and thus maintain much of their security through anonymity. Expect Manadyne to begin contracting outside teams to try to get through the quarantine to retrieve and secure their data.

- Anonymity doesn't hold up inside a quarantine zone. Usually hiding in the open works fine, but places like this stick out once the cover of normalcy isn't there. Take food delivery, for example. Hidden sites often get food to the residents through normal-looking activities like garbage collection or linen deliveries. Those activities don't happen when the walls go up, and folks inside start to creep out, looking for necessities, and get spotted, which starts rumors. Rumors get checked out, and the lack of real security makes the run real easy.
- Goat Foot

- Speaking of prime magical targets inside the QZ, Mystech Labs would be a goldmine for any runner able to crack its mystical security. They still take all the waste from other companies magical processes and work their own brand of magic on it. The place has got to have gigabytes of arcane data and all sorts of materials just waiting to be redistributed. Not to mention the amount of product this place would have sitting around.
- Mika

- Too bad it's inside the QZ and you aren't.
- Ma'fan

- A not-impossible obstacle to overcome.
- Mika

- Looks like we may need to open up the wagering folks. Two hundred on Ma'fan!
- Slamm-0!

Though larger globally, MCT has the magical second chair here in Boston. The AAA gets a lot of employees from MIT&T due to their size, even more than Manadyne, giving MCT the biggest web of magical connections in the metroplex. They use these connections to mask many of their shadow operations, which are mostly against Manadyne, by hiring assets through employees unrelated to the project at hand.

Wuxing has the third-largest presence in Boston, magically speaking. A conversation about Wuxing has to discuss the practices of geomancy and the corp's very traditional practices of magic. Wuxing's interest in the city of Boston focuses heavily on the nature of the city's astral space and the interesting geomantic principles that must be at work for the local manasphere, which reflects a cultural mindset. Wuxing's interests also lie in the growing power of the ley line between Boston and Salem. If any corporation in the area had valuable data or research into that development, it would be Wuxing. The megacorporation has recently been entertaining scientists from Aqua Arcana, but no one is talking about why, and now they're all inside together.

Saeder-Krupp is mainly interested in Boston as a way to keep their agents close to a European rival. Their presence and agenda have generated a lot of shadow work, as the two companies look in on each others' projects.

Aqua Arcana is a small fish compared to the other megacorporations in Beantown, but their impact is felt by all. The company has built a small aquacology out in Boston Harbor near Thompson Island, leading to a lot of tension with Maersk's facilities there.

Ares is a magical player at MIT&T, and their research is primarily defensive, working to better arm the magicians of Knight-Errant on the streets of Boston. They've managed to maintain their edge when there's arcane trouble on the streets of Boston. This happens more often than one might expect, especially if the troublemakers are from another city. I'm not an expert in the field, but I would assume a number of other large security corporations would love to get their hands on some of Ares' latest developments. The problems with running against Ares' magical research in Boston are the ever-present rumors about them letting people field-test their concepts for them, as well as the fact that the city is policed by Knight Errant. There are very few places not under some form of Ares jurisdiction.

As for the rest of the corps in town, they play their normal part in the shadows of Boston as targets for the big fish, or as Johnsons looking to protect their research, or to steal some big ideas to claim as their own. I won't go into names here—there are far too many—but be sure to fully investigate any smaller companies you decide to work for, as they are often not as independent as they seem to be.

- Poke around their personal offices too. Sometimes these companies don't know that someone else owns every piece of mental property that seeps out of their little magical heads.
- Mika

Any discussion of magic and Boston needs to include Salem. The town of Salem has long been connected to magic, and I have little desire to go into the history of the area, but the more recent events of Salem are definitely interesting enough to keep you occupied while we wait for word from Boston.

- Or word from Salem. The quarantine runs all the way up to Beverly Harbor and the Danvers River.
- Arete

One of the best ways to keep your interest is to talk about an exciting topic, like a dragon. In '74, Salem got an influx of excitement when Damon made Boston his latest home. That excitement hasn't waned, as Damon has returned to Salem for every festival and celebration on the city's calendar, and there are a lot of them. Every time he comes to town, the spectacle is greater than the last, and so is the tension. As reported in the *Clutch of Dragons* download, the witches of Salem are not all on the same page, and that division has grown deeper and wider with each festival. I visited during the '74 Summer Solstice to see a few old friends and felt the division personally, as not all of my friends agree on every topic. I was able to get both sides of the story (I'm not saying which side is certifiable truth, or even if I think anyone at all is right), and I moved between the parts of town where supporters and opponents of Damon's presence celebrated separately.

The witches are divided between two main camps: one supports Damon's presence, and the other wants him banned. It bears repeating that neither side of this debate has anything against Damon specifically; the issue is the presence of any dragon at their festivals. In fact, even in the presence of those who think ill of his participation in Salem's celebration, most speak highly of Damon as an individual. There is a third group, made up of witches who actively oppose the dragon personally, but it's very small.

Most of the ire and bile of those who protest Damon's presence are directed at the "trash" and "rabble" that "crash" the festivals to get a glimpse of the dragon. A second concern is his possible misuse of the energy generated by the festivals. There's no hard evidence of any misuse, but there is a sense of it, which can be just as valid with witches. When I asked about the nature of Damon's misuse, I got a lot of speculation that distilled down into three solid hypotheses. Two of them are astrally verifiable, though I have not managed one of those. The third I can't quite follow, since it involves fields of inquiry and principles with which I am unfamiliar, but fundamental parts of it have been confirmed by experts who are.

The one theory I have astrally verified is the formation of a minor ley line between the city of Salem and downtown Boston. This line did not exist with any significance 18 months ago when the *Parageology* report was released to JP, but has grown significantly and rapidly in recent months. There is nothing to link Damon to the line, but there's nothing that precludes a link either. No one knows what aspects this ley line manifests, and I will definitely be keeping an eye out for events to catalogue, and possibly sending a few trusted associates to gather intel.

- Might be a problem 'Hawk. That ley line lies entirely inside the QZ.
- Arete

- I'm well aware of, and working to overcome, that obstacle.
- Winterhawk

- You could try to get into the QZ yourself. I'm headed that way to try and test their blockade. Walls are put up so they can be broken through.
- Kane

There are many similarities between the practices of science and the practices of hermeticism, but for the

most parts these similarities are limited to the practices. I have little interest in discussing scientific principles—just as most scientists tend to glaze over when the topic turns to magic—and find reading scientific studies as boring as a cricket match between the Punjab Rush and Somerset Slammers. This is particularly true when the sciences being discussed are biology, botany, and environmental science, and the studies are of plant growth rates. In the end I was reduced to having to ask someone what it meant. I sought out a reliable and unrelated (to the witches of Salem) source who explained to me that the flora of New England, particularly the region between and around the Boston and Salem, are growing at rates not naturally possible. The witches of Salem who suspect Damon of misusing the power of the celebrations are certain the dragon is responsible. They do not know why, and few of their speculations are pleasant, but they believe the mana gathered and built up during the Wiccan celebrations is being channeled by Damon into the local manasphere. They credit this influx of mana with the unnatural growth rate.

It should be noted that there are reports of new creatures stalking the Wilds. A coven of witches aligned positively with Damon's presence mentioned to me that many of the bio-Awakened drugs (BADs) that Damon is said to spread around Boston's club scene all come from this area. This raises the possibility that his participation in the festivals is nothing more than a program to improve his crop of drugs and build his hoard on the addictions of Boston's youth.

- In other words, you're leaning a little anti-Damon these days.
- Slamm-0!

- I needn't, but I shall, remind us all of tempo and its troubles.
- Winterhawk

- Oh man. I miss those days of plenty. It's so hard to get a fix of it anymore.
- Scrambler

- Can we banhammer him please?
- Pistons

- Do not punish the ignorant, punish the ignorance. Educate them. Scrambler, send me a private message if you wish to gain a little truth and history on tempo.
- Winterhawk

- I thought I was here to educate others, not get some boring history lesson from an old fart who doesn't know how to party.
- Scrambler

- I second the banhammer.
- Winterhawk

For the most interesting, and also unverifiable, hypothesis put forward by the witches of Salem, I went to another old friend, who is an expert on dragons, for greater insight. The witches suspect that Damon is using the heightened flow of mana during the festivals to increase his draconic standing. This idea isn't new or novel, as some believe dragons do not grow in power based on their age or the amount of food they eat, but instead based on their magical energy and how much mana they have channeled in their lives. This concept is not about casting powerful spells, but instead about weaving complex patterns from mana.

The expert to whom I spoke is among those who believe this theory, and he has spoken to a number of dragons about their development and aging process. He was unwilling to go into great detail, but he did explain to me a concept he referred to as Dragon Ascension, which is quite similar to the witches' hypothesis.

Something my associate considered a major issue in all of this is the fact dragons are not always friendly with each other and that dragons of similar status are especially competitive. Status is vital to dragons, as it is the criterion for holding rank in their society, and they are very protective of their standing. Damon endeavoring to increase his own power, and hence status, in Celedyr's backyard could mean some serious trouble. My associate feels this is the attempt of a relatively young adult dragon to jump up the ranks before his time. I will need to study more deeply and perhaps conduct research of my own before I'd feel comfortable reaching even a tentative conclusion on this.

We have briefly touched on the academic field, the corporate world, and nearby Salem. Astral Boston and its spiritual denizens are as atypical as the physical. Boston's astral is always busy—astral forms of projecting mages headed to crosstown on business or pleasure, spirits evidently just enjoying the nature of the place, spirits on errands for their respective summoners, dual-natured beings blending into the masses—at any given time any or all of these and more are present. Boston deserves its nickname as the Hub of the Universe, astrally speaking. Many folks come and visit, and those capable of projecting and manifesting perform the majority of their communicating on or from the astral plane. Compared to many other cities, Boston's astral space is quite safe and well patrolled. The city actually pays an additional premium to Knight-Errant for astral patrols by both summoned spirits and projecting officers.

Overall, Boston is a good place to be Awakened. The city has a lot of arcane resources and tons of Awakened talent. This is both a benefit and a detriment, depending upon the side of that talent you are operating from, but the line of work in which we are involved has never been considered the safest of professions. And now, take everything I have said here as a background to build on now that Boston has succumbed to "something." Something that I will wager a pound of orichalcum is not encephalitis.

- Winterhawk is a remarkable source of information, but his life choices and preference for academia lead him to miss some street-level concerns. With a quarantine in place the playing field changes greatly, and forces that often think they don't have enough power or reach to survive in an open environment will suddenly feel much more gung-ho when the walls go up. Two forces here in Boston that might just think they have a shot at expanding their power base while the walls are up are Franklin Nockai and Carolyn Winters. Both are names whispered, between furtive glances, only in the darkest shadows of Boston.

  Stories about the Roach shaman Franklin Nockai have been used to scare little mages straight for over a decade now—both as a warning against seeking power in dark places for the older ones and as a bad-child stealing boogeyman to frighten disobedient youngsters. The tales are ridiculous fables, but Nockai is a very real and very dangerous person. He has been living beneath the city for a long time, waiting and preparing for his moment. He may see this as that moment, his finally arrived opportunity to expand his cockroach army through kidnapping and violence.

  Carolyn Winters, once CEO of Manadyne, disappeared years ago. No one knows where she went or what happened to her, but if you ask any of Boston's mystical insiders they might just lean in close and whisper the name of a local legend.
- Haze

- Don't forget Fire Alley. With less control and patrols by KE, whatever it is that gives Fire Alley its name may decide to be a little more active.
- Arete

- Not to mention the number of mundanes who might just want to start playing off of local legends to do all those things they couldn't do when the world was watching.
- Kane

- I'd like to remind everyone about the impact tempo had on this town. If you thought Seattle was bad, it had nothing on Boston. As many of us now know the nature of tempo was not just a chemical high, but a mystical one as well. A mystical connection to some really bad juju. A lot of those addicts never really recovered, and a good number are still here, eking out a living looking for their next fix. Many of them will do just about anything for a BAD high, even if it's not tempo. The point is that this place is full of folks whose souls have been touched by the dark force behind tempo and are desperate for anything that might fill the void left behind. Haze mentioned Winters, and it would be good to remember her/it when thinking about the mystical dark side of Boston.
- Axis Mundi

MEDICAL MIRACLES

POSTED BY: BUTCH

Bull just hit me with the request to prep a rundown on what's going on in the biotech industry in and around Boston since he knows I've been keeping my eyes on that sprawl for awhile now. This should be an easy write-up, even if I am worried about some friends inside the QZ, but bear with me as I might be a little scatterbrained and still haven't managed eight straight hours of sleep since 2073. Ever since Miles Lanier made his JackPoint cameo and left us with that collection of files about personality shifts and people going crazy, I've been focused on CFD. A lot of my attention has been on Boston since that's where I think two of the best suspects, NeoNET and Evo, have moved their projects.

I've continued trying to keep close tabs on Evo's Dickens Program and NeoNET's Project Imago. Familiar names to anyone who's read the *Stolen Souls* download: datatrails, corporate speculation, and some physical fingers all pointed directly at these guys to be the primary sources for all things related to CFD. And if this quarantine is anything but that, I'll hand over all six of my Seattle shadowclinics to Slamm-O! and retire. Back in January '75, at about the same time Lanier came to us, NeoNET (meaning Celedyr, in this case) moved some major projects from Albuquerque to Boston. I'm now sure at least one of those projects was work on Imago, though I have trouble conceiving his moving the entire mountain full of servers he was reputed to have. The techwyrm also moved projects from Caerleon to Boston around the same time and has since spent more time in Boston than Wales, from what I understand.

Since I was planning to pay so much attention to this place, and I had some research work for Doc Wagon that they're using at MassGen, I figured why not get up to date on the latest and greatest in developments? It had a lot to do with looking into those who might be researching CFD, ways around CFD, and ways to use CFD inappropriately as well and trying to see if any companies were coming up with good solutions to the problems CFD has created with nanoware, gene treatments, and other biotech.

Since were talking shadowbiz here I'll definitely touch on the whispers I've heard on the agritech front as well, since it's another booming business here. All of this will help me get my mind off CFD for a few minutes too, and I could probably use that. Maybe I'll have an epiphany while babbling about all this other science.

All right, here we go.

MEDTECH

Let's start with the big one. Boston is one of the top five cities in the world mentioned when talking about innovations and advancements in medtech. Whether it's Doc Wagon at their MassGen research labs, Universal Omnitech pushing something out of their lab complex on MIT&T's campus, or an independent researcher working over at Harvard, someone in Boston is advancing medtech on a daily basis.

What that means for us is opportunity. UO's latest innovation could be Doc Wagon's next big moneymaker if the run goes right, but we all know that. Current projects being researched in Boston are far more important to discuss. That way you know a little about what you might be getting yourself into.

DOC WAGON

No secret most of Doc Wagon's research goes on in their labs at Massachusetts General Hospital, MassGen for short. This is the number one trauma hospital in the NEMA, and a lot of research goes into dealing with trauma patients. Some of the earliest trauma patch formulations came out of MassGen. and they are still the leader in developing newer, faster, and more reliable trauma relief systems. Their current SOTA research is going into their medkit and surgical suite designs.

Their medkit work is advancing the realm of field medicine to the point where patients arriving at the MassGen ER who've been worked on in the field by Doc Wagon medics are passed right through to a room. It's making Doc Wagon the premier choice in the NEMA. Of course, their ongoing field tests are making Doc Wagon rigs some of the most targeted vehicles on the streets as other corps look to reverse engineer the Doc Wagon medkit features.

UO BOSTON COCKTAILS

ACCELERATOR

This stuff will speed you up to near-SOTA wired reflexes speeds by chemically enhancing transmission and reception speeds. The back end isn't a major crash or slow cycle, instead it's full sensory hallucinations combined with extreme paranoia. Given the unpleasant psychological effects of withdrawal, the addiction factor for this cocktail is practically nil. The "getting your ass kicked by your buddies after you freak out post run" factor is pretty high, though. Especially since the paranoia is commonly violent.

BUFFOUT

If you want to shred your tendons while lifting a Citymaster or crush the bones in your hand punching through its thick armored side, this is the drug for you. Buffout does a great job of simulating hysterical strength—the "protective mother" response that allows people to exceed their normal physical limits in times of extreme stress. This is another of UO's amazing minimal withdrawal drugs, but who needs withdrawal when one's muscles are damaged by the effects. Sadly these effects are often not even felt until after the drug wears off and the user is suddenly wracked with pain from multiple strain injuries. Mental side effects include irrational behavior while on buffout, followed by confusion after its effects have worn off.

NUMB

If the saying "No pain, no gain" is true, than no gain is ever made on numb. UO has concocted a chemical cocktail that completely voids all pain sensations (and a few others) for the user. Sucking chest wound? No pain. Amputated limb? No pain. Fingers crushed one by one with a hammer? No pain. It's great for the gunbunny looking to get out of trouble through a hail of bullets he knows he can't avoid or who just wants to step in the ring and go a round with a cybered up troll. (It only numbs pain, though, so he'd still be dead before the second round.) What are the negatives of this chemical masterpiece, you ask? First off, gradual reduction in the body's natural ability to resist pain. The more you use this, the more life hurts when you aren't using it. Second problem, SDDS (Sudden Dumbass Death Syndrome). There is a good chance the user is already dead when it wears off. That reminds me of a second use for this: hostile environment trauma survival. I know a medic who uses this stuff to get extreme trauma cases to move themselves. Makes the injuries even worse, but it allows the medic to get the patient somewhere much better equipped to save his life, like a hospital. You take the good, you take the bad.

PINPOINT

This stuff is great for the runner on point or on watch. Pinpoint puts a user's brain in overdrive. They don't get any more intelligent, sadly, but they get to be some seriously fast-thinking fraggers. Thinking is clear and quick. It lasts long enough to be solidly useful, but it has a high back-end cost. The user usually mentally collapses from being in mental overdrive. They can walk and move around, but talking and even basic decision making processes are pretty much non-existent. From super spotter to slug brain in the matter of a half hour or so.

Most runners don't realize how valuable advances in the realm of surgical suites are to them, but every time the local hospitals upgrade their surgical suites, the lower-end clinics and street docs benefit from the hand-me-downs and castoffs. Some of the shadowclinics in Boston benefit even more, as Doc Wagon contracts them to use the new surgical suites with their clients. This way any problems don't get reported, and their clients aren't harmed in any way. Isn't that nice?

UNIVERSAL OMNITECH

Drugs, drugs, and more drugs. UO has a number of new lines of custom performance-enhancing cocktails that are currently in field trials. And by field trials I mean given to runners looking for an edge who are monitored and required to report back on the effects if they survive. I have a friend in the Boston shadows who has been dealing with the UO drug frenzy for the past few months. His patients have been coming in after using UO's testers complaining of everything from headaches to seizures, with the entire gamut of physical and psychological symptoms cropping up as well. On the other hand, the positive effects are undeniable. One of their cocktails gives the same reflexive speed boost as a full wired reflexes suite. It makes jazz look mild and has very mild physical side effects and virtually no addictive properties. Sounds great, right? Problem is, right after the drug wears off the hallucinations and paranoia begin. I'll link up the briefs I put together on four of their most popular creations right now.

CYBERWARE

With nanotech on the outs in the manufacturing game, quite a few pieces of cyber have been getting rede-

veloped with some older manufacturing processes in mind. Alongside these new manufacturing methods are a number of cyber-suite designs. These suites focus their development on maximizing a desired effect while minimizing invasiveness through the coordination of system design and the minimization of redundant systems in the hardware. The best part of this for runners is that the companies are focusing a lot of their designs on military and security contracts, so suites are being designed with some high-end restricted gear. That means if you can get your hands on it and get connected with a doc who can do the install, you can keep your biointegrity up.

One problem with these suites is that they don't play well with other systems, so docs have to pull all your other wares out to put this in. Even just a simple datajack that isn't part of the meshed system can destroy the stability of the suite. Same goes on the back end. Once you get one of these suites you're done—no more augmentations for you!

Goods news is the schematics for these suites are some of the hottest data on the streets. Oh, wait, that can be bad news too if you let MCT find out you have the latest Renraku kit and they want to take a peek and try to reverse-engineer whatever they take out of you.

Hot names in Boston right now for these suites are Transys-Erika, Sony Cybersystems, SpinRad Industries, MCT, and Evo, but each of them seem to be focusing in different areas with the suites they are assembling. There's a little overlap here and there, but the R&D for each suite is so intense they don't seem to be doing a lot of parallel tests. Instead they have been doing a lot of contracting for shadowruns.

TRANSYS-ERIKA

Transys seems to be going the shotgun effect with its suites. They have a basic line to which different upgrade suites can be added to build up a customized or specialized suite. This comparatively low-cost entry-level suite with upgrades available at several price points gives Transys a wider market appeal than the other corps. They do focus heavily in headware systems but bodyware upgrades have reduced redundancy to minimize bulk and cost. Transys probably has the greatest stock of test data and the best information on systems that don't work well together—which can be just as important as which ones do. Data showing your headware can't use the type of bone lacing augmentation you're considering for wiring integration can save you a lot of money and headaches. Literally.

SONY CYBERSYSTEMS

Sony has been working to enhance the combat value of your average hacker for years. Marketing the suites to corporate and military special operations teams that need all their assets to be active combatants due to the unit's small size. Though many corporate deckers now operate above the law with authorization from GOD, that is not true of covert-ops teams or company runner teams that cannot afford to get tagged while using company code on illegal activities.

SPINRAD INDUSTRIES

Johnny has always been a bit of an extreme sports fan, and his company's suites are heavily skewed towards the cyber-sports leagues. There are quite a few different models that often change in only a few key ways. He offers a basic suite and then offers customers customized setups for the sport they play. Some of the systems even crossover well into the shadows.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

This is where you will see the street sammies getting their suites. MCT designs combat suites for a wide variety of applications and different levels of integration, from close-quarters specialists to long-range sniper suites and everything in between. MCT has a pitch out to several militaries and security companies around the world. Members of their own Petrovski Security and Parashield subsidiaries have been volunteering to test out suites for discounts and increased promotional considerations for almost a year now. The integrated systems have less of an effect on bio-integrity (Essence as the wizzers call it), so quite a few of Parashield's Awakened staff members have utilized the program.

EVO

These suites are fun, but not necessarily functional. Following their very transhumanist way of thinking, the folks at Evo are using this technology to test the limits of what it is to be metahuman. They use implants to alter and create beings that few would be able to tell are, or once were, metahumans of any kind. Inspired by SURGE cases, Evo has made suites to make man into the maximum machine, animal amalgamations, and creatures of fantasy and mythology that even the Awakening has not yet brought to our world.

BIOWARE

The field of bioware has a lot of interested parties doing almost daily shadowruns to supplement their continuous R&D in the one field that seems safe from the danger of CFD. Implants designed in Boston are being installed and field tested in all corners of the world, including their own backyard. The SOTA standard is constantly being pushed here, but there are some new developments that I'm pretty excited about, especially Doc Wagon's TraumaStop organ replacement. The TraumaStop is an organ replacement treatment designed to

deliver instant trauma relief and has become a selectable upgrade on all Doc Wagon contracts. At Gold level the surgery is free and the system can be bought with a discount. At Platinum, the whole thing is free.

- That sounds like advertising, Butch. Getting a check from DW now?
- Clockwork

- Just a small one for every system they install because I'm the designer. It's about the only thing I've done in the realm of real medical science in the past few years. Especially this past year. I feel like I'm a character in some science-fiction trid trying to fight the invading menace, except I guess this story was written with the AIs as the heroes.
- Butch

NANOTECH

A valuable field that once had limitless possibilities obliterated by CFD. I know the media spins that it's all about hackers and technomancers and bad code, but we all know why this field has practically died in the last year. The only places that are still heavily using nanotech are the orbital manufacturing plants, and even those have changed a lot in the last year.

Here in Boston, research continues on ways to produce clean nanites that aren't susceptible to "Temporal Code Degradation," as the media refers to it. This research has been a roller-coaster ride for the labs that perform it. They exist under strict containment and wireless restriction protocols, and whenever a run penetrates the lab it's washed out of whatever program it was part of and a new lab has to be built to replace it.

One of the biggest impacts the nano-scare has had is tech regression. Most folks don't realize just how many things nanotech builds, especially in the cyber, medical, and computer industries. Our devices and tech are actually starting to get bigger instead of smaller for the first time in this century. It's not a full-blown dark age of tech, but until the nanofabrication issue can be fixed we are definitely backsliding into some older building models. This new trend has had some interesting effects in the shadows; as we get hired to grab stocks of older and smaller tech, we make runs on old plants and firms that haven't been SOTA in over a decade to grab programs, equipment, and data files on the next big thing.

This has also meant a major upswing in the market for pre-Crash 2.0 data and information. We're seeing a lot of digging into old systems at the research labs around Boston. The labs hire us as security and to get to these old systems in the first place. Techheads have been getting snagged and swapped all over Boston in an effort to get the most secure integration software and tech between the old systems and the newest decks.

Speaking of cyberdecks, that's another victim of the nano-scare. They aren't quite the big bulky monsters of my youth, but they are definitely not as small and sleek as they were before CFD.

And now I'm way off topic. Told you, scatterbrained. Not much else I can really say about nanotech other than it's a victim of CFD that's going to need a lot of time and effort and probably luck to ever regain its status as a trusted tech.

- Not Boston related, but there have been a number of runs heading off-world to check out how the nanomanufacturing plants are coping, and rumors even say a few out to Gagarin to see how they are dealing with the nanite failure, what with survival pretty much dependent on nanotech. We all have our suspicions as to why they're doing okay, but that also means they may have developed some way of keeping their nanites from getting glitchy.
- Fianchetto

GENETECH

Though I had foreseen this field taking more of a hit with its connection to CFD, in the world of public opinion it is still mostly positive. Genetech companies still advertise becoming the pinnacle of you with just a few minor treatments. Other than Shiawase having some troubles with their Léonization procedures, most of the news and PR coming from this field is positive. The industry's still thriving because the media has not blamed genetech for anything, and there have been very few reports indicating anything wrong with genetic manipulation or relating genetech to recent incidents. In fact, certain areas are growing fast here in Boston.

The genetech we runners are most familiar with to help us gain or keep an edge on the competition is still holding its own in corporate labs and research facilities even though somewhere up the executive chain someone must know the connection to speeding up the CFD process. It's not really a growing field but it's still an option. Where genetech is really growing is in relation to food sources and agritech.

Animal species are genetically modified then raised in the waters all around Boston. Most of the modifications are intended to increase the growth rate and size of food species. Competing firms go for data first, but they'll often hire runners to steal a specimen from a rival's facility so they can analyze where the manipulations went on and see if they can use it in their stock. For us the problem comes in with the most common defense mechanism the companies have created, the rapid DNA decay that occurs when the species dies. This means we need to bring in live subjects and that can be difficult with a 130-kilo salmon. The companies will also manipulate the species' junk DNA code in order to throw off other science labs. Not an issue for us, but I just thought I'd mention it as an interesting fact.

AGRITECH

This field has rocketed to the forefront of the scientific research and development in Boston over the past year and a half. Less than a handful of firms were doing research in this area back at the beginning of '74. Then Sirrurg decided to blast NatVat, everyone started worrying about worldwide famine, and firms started really pushing for alternative food sources. Now Boston is home to over three-dozen agritech firms that are looking into alternate and custom-bred plants, bacteria that transform dirt into something really close to food, and algal species that are not only edible but enhance plant growth around them.

Most of the megacorps have at least one subsidiary in the mix and a lot of small A and even some AA-rated corps are playing in this field. The smaller corps are often targets of the bigger fish. If it looks cheaper to pull an op and steal all their research data, that's preferred over an expensive buyout. I'll link up my little list of some of the big players and the areas I know they are playing in, but remember, playing in that area doesn't necessarily mean they have it right.

The Boston shadows are an interesting field for these guys. Big breaks are often kept as quiet as possible, and failures are sometimes leaked as big breaks. Nothing better than to get your rival to release a product you already know causes severe allergic reactions in twenty-seven percent of your test pool. These corps play games all the time.

- These places are going to be targets inside the QZ. I'm sure if they aren't warzones yet, they will be soon.
- Nephrine

BACTERITECH (ARES)

This is where I got word about the bacteria that transforms dirt into a sterile, relatively nutritive paste. The current problem is the paste is only one component in a complex toxic glop. They're working on ways to filter out all the undesirable compounds without ruining the nutritive paste. No word on their progress, but others are definitely interested in getting their hands on a sample of the paste and the bacteria. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending—these guys have some primo security from Hard Corps.

AZTECHNOLOGY AGRIBLOCK

(AUSTRAFARM, NATURE-TASTE, PRODUCTOS CULTIVATOS, CARLSBERG-HEINEKEN, NATURAL VAT TECHNOLOGIES)

The Aztechnology agriblock is a force to be reckoned with in the NEMA. Though NatVat got slammed by Sirrurg in Borinquen, they have been redistributing funds to many of their other operations to make up for the loss. NatVat Boston has gotten a considerable funding boost and is the team leader for Aztechnology's firms in the Axis. That's not to say they all work together all the time. Each still has its own profit margin to worry about, but when it comes to outsiders looking to steal from one, the others will often help in recovering whatever gets taken.

AustraFarm Boston specializes in fish engineering and is currently focused on breeding feeder fish. These monstrosities would choke a megalodon, if they could survive long enough in the wild to get eaten. The top specimen so far is a 137 kilogram land-locked salmon. These fish can't swim freely because of their bulk, but they have to be active to stay healthy, so AF uses what look like underwater merry-go-rounds to keep them moving. AF has other breeds, of course, and they aren't the only firm working on fish. Runs on AF are usually datasteals, snatching the genetic codes for the fish rather than the fish themselves.

Nature-Taste is an interesting part of the AZT family here in Boston. They work with foodstuffs developed by the other companies and find ways to make them taste better. For example, myco-protein is compact, inexpensive, and packs a lot of nutrition. In it's natural state it's the vilest slop you can imagine. But with N-T's FlavoTech™ line of additives, that foul slop can be made to taste like every part of your favorite home-cooked meal. Plenty of other companies want to know how they do what they do and what's coming next. Some of their latest work has been developing flavor additives that blend with specific foodstuffs. An additive that tastes like chicken, to take a popular example, will taste just a bit different with soy-base, myco-protien base, or even on some vatgrown meat, so they're working on specific lines for each. This may sound like a difference that makes no difference, but shadowrunners lost their lives last March trying to steal their soy-specific corned beef flavoring.

Carlsberg-Heineken is always looking to make a better soybeer or less caustic synthahol. Problem is, alcohol breaks down all the usual flavor-additive mediums, so they've been working with Nature-Taste to develop a new approach. Rumors are rampant and runs are definitely in the works to snag the formula for the pumpkin beer that was supposed to hit this fall.

LIGHTNING BRANDS (EVO)

The R&D branch of Lightning foods keeps a low profile around the NEMA but they have over two dozen different facilities all over the Northeast. When I say low-profile, I mean it literally. Most of their R&D sites are located in both natural and man-made subterranean structures. Lightning is developing foodcrops that don't require sunlight to grow in addition to varieties able to grow under artificial light. Xiao Technologies and RosKosmos are working in conjunction with Lightning, developing technology to deliver the maximum amount of light

energy with the minimal use of power. Once perfected, these foodcrops will have a significant, if not fundamental, impact on fields such as space exploration, underwater development, and deep-Earth mining.

S&S AGRICORP (NEONET)

These guys are all over the place in their work. They are a NeoNET subsidiary and definitely benefit from the hometown corp's mentality. They have land and water rights to areas that have been off limits since Boston was British. The main reason they were granted those rights is the way they marketed their primary mission: the development of cooperative ecosystems—systems wherein different species function together so both flourish to their maximum. Most people read that as an effort to revive and restore the natural environment, but there's no money in nature—it's all agribusiness. And profitable enough for them to bury any report about what they're really about under a pile credsticks. Their places are interesting; tightly packed little eco-communities of algae, plants, and fish species, all designed to feed into each other for a maximum agricultural output and minimal loss between trophic levels. Standard trophic loss is generally considered a factor of ten (though it varies). S&S, by contrast, has a factor range of 1.6-4.1 in their little ecosystem. That is a massive savings of energy between levels.

SENSEI SNACKS (SHIAWASE)

Everybody loves snacky foods. Sensei's R&D labs around Boston develop alternative snack food items and test them in the local market. You might be wondering how a snack food test marketing campaign affects runners. Answer: by runners being hired to poison people. Sensei takes quite a few hits during these tests when people get sick. The test food is rarely the cause but runner teams have been hired to tail participants and then slip them something to make them sick. The participants, blame Sensei and they lose product face. These aren't the big score retirement runs every runner hopes for, but they can fill the piggy bank enough to help cover your food bills. Especially when the other companies pay in foodstuffs.

- Seriously? I'd love to get paid in SnackyPuffs for my criminal activities. WTF?
- Kane

- Other corps often use the Sensei Snack sabotage as a tester run for newbs in Boston. It needs to stay quiet and undetected, just like most real work in Boston. If a team can't hack it on one of these, they get some serious black-listing.
- Southie

- You ever done one, Southie?
- Kane

- Almost every kid in South Boston has done at least a dozen of these. It's how a lot of them stay fed.
- Southie

UNIVERSAL OMNITECH

UniOmni has their fingers in every agribusiness pie. They develop new crops, test crops, develop fertilizers, develop insecticides, refine fish and arthropod genes to maximize foodstuff usefulness, and just about anything else you can think of. One of their biggest tickets right now is their work on Maine lobster genetics, boosting size, growth rate, and flavor. According to rumor they've grafted some lizard genes—the ones that enable lizards to grow their tails back—into the lobster genome. Word is they can harvest four to six extra-large tails a year off the same lobster. UniOmni mastered the lizard trick while trying to find a way to exploit the rapid regeneration abilities of some Awakened species. Either they couldn't isolate the mechanism, or they couldn't transfer the ability between species, but you can be sure they haven't given up on that project. Just about everyone wants to see what UniOmni is working on; they've got a pretty big bullseye on their back at all times.

ZETA-IMPCHEM

Chemical companies and agricultural development have gone hand in hand for decades. Need something cheap to keep the bugs off? Call Dow. Need something cheap to help the plants grow faster? Contact Helena. Easier—and far cheaper—than doing things the clean way. No one cared about the environment until the world Awakened and the environment started spawning vengeful spirits to terrorize your operations. Not that the biochem corps considered changing their ways for a minute—they just warded their facilities and hired some arcane security. Heir to everything that went before, ZI has some primo astral and arcane security and produces industry-leading chemical fertilizers and insecticides. Technologies that other firms would love to access without having to pay Z-IC's prices.

HOOLIGAN

LOCKDOWN TIMELINE

"Ma'am, we have all the flights grounded and all the trains held inside the target zone," Captain Allan Torvell reported while delivering a crisp salute.

"How are the highways doing Captain? And the side streets? What about the rural routes and wilds? I don't care about the two easiest things to enforce in a quarantine situation. I told DeeCee I'd have full lockdown by sundown tomorrow. Which means I want it by sun-up." Colonel Laura Bosco left the Captain hanging with the salute until she was done berating him for his inept report, then she gave a crisp return.

"The major highways are stopped, but we've had some trouble getting the people to turn around. Many are waiting for the drill to end, and seventeen have been arrested for trying to bypass the blockades. Side streets and rural routes are sixty-three percent covered, and that should be up to one hundred percent once the NeoNET and Ares personnel report to their posts. According to Aztechnology personnel, the wilds are a hundred percent patrolled, but they've requested additional arcane forces to maintain that level of coverage, along with ground personnel to deal with anyone trying to exit the target zone. They've reported two incidents so far, neither fatal." Captain Torvell tried to sound confident in his delivery, but he had to know the sixty-three-percent figure would not make the Colonel happy.

"Two non-fatal, eh. How many fatal that they are already covering up? Damn Azzies." Bosco sighed silently, then took a minute to absorb Torvell's full report.

She wondered how long the drill story would hold up. She was hoping until the morning, at least sun-up, and then they could fully cut the power and blank out the grids completely while they set up new security protocols. She worried about her husband, Colonel Tyler Bosco, stationed at the airport inside the QZ, but she had to make sure emotion didn't play into her decisions today. There would be plenty of emotional people soon enough.

"Give the Azzies some MCT mages and send Lone Star to cover the ground operations," she finally said. Then she let a small smile creep across her face.

"Lone Star and MCT, yes ma'am," Torvell said. Bosco thought she heard a note of question in his voice, and she didn't blame him. The combination might be trouble, but she hoped they wouldn't have to work together for long.

"Push our National Guard units over to the side streets and rural routes. They can get those under control and get relieved once we have all the corporate personnel we're coordinating with." The Colonel then turned away without relieving the junior officer.

Torvell stood quietly behind her, waiting to be dismissed. He had to know by now. The scope of this. The chances she was taking—he had to have already guessed that this was more than a drill. If he had questions, though, he didn't ask. In the end, Bosco figured it was easier for everyone involved to keep pretending they thought this was a drill, even if they knew it wasn't. If they stopped and thought about what it really was, it could be overwhelming.

The pretending, though, would be more difficult with what she had to say next. "Captain, get my husband on the line. He's at Logan," Bosco ordered. She knew the command was against the current operating orders, but she needed to know something about Torvell.

"Logan's within the quarantine Ma'am. I can't follow that order," Torvell said with as little shake in his voice as he could muster. It was never easy to refuse an order, even if it was the right thing.

Colonel Bosco didn't turn. She stood facing away, silence hung in the air of the small office for almost five minutes.

"That call?" Bosco finally asked.

"Still against orders, Ma'am. Shall I contact the MPs?" Torvell asked.

So even if Torvell knew this was far beyond a drill, he wasn't ready to break protocol. His knowledge of the truth hadn't seeped fully in yet.

"Dismissed, Captain," Bosco said calmly. "Next report at zero four thirty."

Torvell gave a quick salute, turned on his heels, and marched out of the office.

Bosco made a mental note of Torvell's actions and put him on the list of "first to know". He followed orders. That was what she was going to need from her officers once the truth was revealed. Once she told everyone that the entire Boston Metroplex was under indefinite lockdown.

- So I know a guy who knows a guy, and through the grapevine I managed to snag a blog that had been locked down in a NeoNET archive. It was put together by a guy on the inside who posted right up until the Big Ten went dark, and even beyond. The initial blog got snagged by NeoNET's Matrix Security and locked away, but hackers being what they are, portions of it leaked. Then I put the portions together and got something like a whole. This serves as a good way to build a timeline on just what went down in Boston, while also showing what kind of propaganda was being spread around as the gates swung closed.
- Slamm-0!

BLOG ENTRIES OF HUBLOGGER

06/04/2076, 19:15 EST: UNIDENTIFIED DRAGON ESCAPES MIT&T LAB

Just before nineteen hundred an unidentified "iridescent" dragon was seen violently exiting an underground lab on the campus of MIT&T. The dragon blasted out of the ground near a lab building and then emerged into the quad. From there the dragon took flight and headed toward the Hub.

A dragon of similar appearance was spotted minutes later delivering a devastating assault on the NeoNET Towers in the Hub, resulting in major structural damage to Tower 4. Eyewitnesses claim the dragon was impacted by an invisible force. The force was enough to propel the dragon all the way out to Fenway Park, crushing the Green Monster in the middle of the Red Sox-Tigers game. The game was called—on account of "raining dragons," I guess—and will be rescheduled later in the season.

The dragon eventually recovered from its stunned condition and flew off again. Eyewitnesses say it looked confused at first and flew off to the north, passing once more through the Hub but far less violently this time. Reports indicate it flew north as far as Salem but was not seen beyond the witches' suburb.

Reports are coming in from every area the dragon has passed of an "iridescent rain." Though some joke the substance is dragon urine, there is a significant danger in this strange phenomenon, especially considering this dragon recently left a lab facility of unexplained purposes. Stay clear of the iridescent rain. Stay indoors and stay safe.

06/04/2076, 20:45 EST: KE CORDONS MIT&T LAB AND FENWAY PARK, NEONET EVACUATES TOWER 4

After the dragon incident involving MIT&T and Fenway, Knight Errant has called in all officers to enforce a cordon around the sites. The cordon is intended to keep gapers from flocking to the locations. It seems to be working for MIT&T, but Fenway has been surrounded by Sox fans trying to get a look at the destroyed baseball landmark.

According to eyewitness reports, the cordon at Fenway is keeping fans inside the stadium until damages can be assessed, while also preventing all communications from the site. Officers on site aren't talking, but I've heard speculation that the efforts are intended to prevent people from looting pieces of the damaged stadium.

NeoNET has declared NeoNET Tower 4 structurally unsound and has evacuated the site. They also have spirits and mages on site providing barriers and additional support for Tower 4. Chatter on the police channels say there are worries the thing will come down before dawn.

Official warnings are telling all citizens to avoid the sites, as the dragon's attack, crash, and escape could have damaged gas and power lines. What they're not saying is they want people out of the way as they figure out what the hell happened.

06/04/2076, 21:15 EST: UPDATE ON THE FENWAY CORDON

New news from Fenway reports that the Knight Errant officers on site have expanded the cordon by a block, and hazmat teams have been called in to vet people before they leave the stadium. Tents and trailers are moving in quickly, meaning they don't expect to have everyone out in short time.

I'm still waiting on more eyewitness reports from the crash of the dragon and to hear what the aftermath of the crash was like—haven't gotten anything new in almost two hours.

06/04/2076, 22:04 EST: SQUATTERS GONE WILD

The excitement continues around Boston as squatters in and near the cordoned-off areas have started reacting to the intrusion of so many officials and have been violently attacking residents in those areas, including Knight Errant officers working to enforce the cordons. The attacks seem unprovoked and completely without rhyme or reason. In a number of cases the victims have been bitten, scratched, pummeled, and kicked. The situation is made worse by the number of gawkers who have come to the Hub hoping to see the dragon or the wreckage it caused.

The injured have been taken to a number of local hospitals, while the majority of the attackers have been taken to local Knight Errant lock-ups or McLean Hospital, a psychiatric hospital west of the Hub in Belmont, which has a small hospital on site for trauma care. According to sources inside Knight Errant, none of the attacks have been fatal, but two of the violent perpetrators were fatally injured while resisting arrest.

Actions during the arrest have led Knight Errant to consider the possibility of drug involvement, possibly even a resurgence of tempo use. Which would be remarkably horrible timing.

06/04/2076, 23:10 EST: KNIGHT ERRANT CORDONS AT MIT&T LAB AND FENWAY PARK HAVING TROUBLES

I'm getting in more reports, slowly but surely, from my contacts on the street. Communications are shoddy right now, probably from whatever is hovering in the air with this iridescent rain. The iridescent quality has thinned but is definitely still hanging over the city.

According to my sources the squatters seem to be gaining focus and coordination. They are attacking the cordon in force at specific locations, particularly on the south side of downtown and at the bridges. What at first seemed like random acts of violence are beginning to form a pattern. I'm not sure what this means, but it's clearly nothing good.

06/05/2076, 02:00 EST:
MIT&T OUT OF CONTROL, KNIGHT ERRANT EXPANDS CORDON AROUND CAMBRIDGE

A late night rash of assaults and, according to sources on the scene, "near psychotic behavior" have forced the Knight Errant cordon to expand and declare a state of emergency around the MIT&T campus and a large portion of the Cambridge neighborhood. The cordon is using physical structures now—fences are going up to barricade streets. All citizens living inside the cordon were ordered to stay inside their homes and wait for Knight Errant officers to arrive in order to escort legal citizens out of the cordon. Squatters are, as usual, left to their own devices—at least, the ones that haven't already been taken into custody following an assault.

Speaking of assaults, more violent incidents are being reported all around the Boston area. The large number of officers working the cordons has drastically increased the response time to incidents outside those extremely dangerous areas. Citizens have been informed to stay home tonight and warned that taking measures into their own hands is a criminal offense.

06/05/2076, 02:12 EST:
SQUATTER INSANITY SPREADING

It appears the violent behavior of the local squatters is spreading. Reports from as far west as Somerville and as far north as Peabody are reporting incidents of unprovoked attacks. The attacks are following the pattern set in earlier attacks in the Hub. These events are leading to massive overcrowding at local health facilities as well as Knight Errant lock ups. Lone Star Correctional Services has been contacted to assist, allowing the use of some of their detention facilities in the region.

Knight Errant has already contacted and gained the approval of the UCAS government seeking emergency support from local National Guard units to help secure troubled areas and aid in the evacuation of the Fenway crash site. Guardsmen are being told to report for duty as early as 0300 hours, but some internal reports I happened to get my hands on indicate that actual deployment will not occur until at least 0500 hours for logistical reasons.

06/05/2076, 04:10 EST:
CORPORATE COURT CALLS EMERGENCY MEETING

Events in Boston have been spotted from orbit! Due to the need for coordination between Ares Macrotechnology subsidiary Knight Errant Security Services and Lone Star subsidiary Lone Star Correctional Services, the Corporate Court has called an emergency meeting to address the situation. Commenters on the ground have a feeling that AA Lone Star is about to get pushed around by their primary competitor's AAA parent megacorp.

The meeting is also expected to address concerns over the increasing violence in the Boston area. The sudden surge of violence likely has the CC worried about how it will affect major corporate holdings in the city (naturally, NeoNET is particularly worried), and they're also concerned about a potential spread south to Manhattan, which could threaten the security of the East Coast Stock Exchange.

I'm not sure I'll be able to get any news from what comes from this meeting, as the communications down here are getting worse and worse. I'm not sure anyone is even getting onto my site to be able to read this. But even as information gets tougher to find, interest is growing. In the morning, everyone will be talking about Boston.

06/05/2076, 05:12 EST:
MASSIVE NATIONAL EMERGENCY DRILL EXERCISE ISOLATES SECTION OF BOSTON

The Massachusetts National Guard has begun a National Emergency Drill to isolate the section of the Northeast Metroplex Axis (NEMA) around Boston. Guardsmen claim the action is only a standard drill, but people around the city who have been watching the news don't believe that for a second. Travel into and out of the area has been completely restricted, including local short-hop VTOL flights. At least one VTOL that broke the border was brought down after the CC's Grid Overwatch Division (GOD) remotely took control.

My sources all over—at least, the ones I can get a hold of—are connecting the dots. It looks pretty bad for us.

06/05/2076, 07:14 EST:
DAYLIGHT BRINGS NO RELIEF

Morning did not bring the relief of this dark night that others expected. In fact, it seems to have gotten worse. Acts of violence are occurring all over the Hub and throughout the nearby Boston region. News reports are beginning to connect the attacks. Knight Errant, as well as local government agencies, have begun looking for terrorist cells, possibly linked to TerraFirst! and Warpath, who may be behind the attacks.

Knight Errant is focusing on their domestic cordon while allowing National Guard and UCAS government

forces to focus on the terrorism investigation and maintaining a lockdown over a large chunk of the NEMA. UCAS citizens within Boston are ordered to stay in their homes. Extraterritorial citizens are being asked to stay on megacorporate property.

By some miracle NeoNET Tower 4 is still standing. I'm getting very little verifiable data from that area, but it seems NeoNET is putting a lot of effort into keeping the tower up. Most speculate it's an effort to prevent the collapsing tower from damaging any of the other towers. I can't help but think there's something else at stake.

06/05/2076, 09:10 EST:
KE EXPANDS CORDON, INCLUDES ALL NON-EXTRATERRITORIAL PROPERTY

As the number of violent incidents continues to rise, Knight Errant has expanded their cordon around the Hub to include all non-extraterritorial properties. They have informed all citizens to stay indoors and avoid traveling. Megacorporations have been warned that all necessary travel should be done through skywalks or via VTOL craft and rooftop landings.

This warning has not prevented street travel, and large numbers of panicked mobs have been seen fleeing from indoor outbreaks of violence. This blogger recommends following the Knight Errant cordon rules unless you're in some sort of immediate danger.

Medical reports are coming in from early attacks, and it looks like some of the initial violence is being caused by what some doctors are calling a "rapid onset encephalitis epidemic" and may not be terrorist related at all.

06/05/2076, 14:54 EST:
HOSPITALS AND CLINICS FILLED TO CAPACITY WITH UNEXPLAINED ILLNESSES

Medical facilities around the Hub and surrounding neighborhoods, especially those affected by the "iridescent rain" of the dragon last night, are being overrun by individuals complaining of severe headaches, blurry vision, and seizures. Most of the patients are being turned away or held at nearby temporary facilities. The temporary facilities, usually intended for regional emergencies, include area high schools and warehouse facilities near the hospitals. Medical personnel are being shuttled back and forth in order to address needs at all facilities. Looks like more of the encephalitis epidemic.

Doc Wagon and CrashCart are both currently operating at maximum capacity picking up clients and dealing with emergency calls, and representatives have said that all Doc Wagon personnel have been called in to deal with the expanding emergency.

06/05/2076, 16:25 EST:
BOSTON GRIDLOCKED

Looks like GridGuide still works and obeys the commands of the powers that be. Boston's roads are locked down from Salem all the way down to Dunham. All traffic is being redirected off the highways and byways and into parking facilities, or people are being sent back to their homes. The system has been refusing to allow vehicles to travel.

To make things worse, the highways (and a lot of regular streets, it looks like) have become battlegrounds of go-gangs. Knight Errant, as well as federal authorities, have had little success controlling the roving bands of criminals who have disabled their GridGuide systems or use custom vehicles that don't even have them.

06/05/2076, 17:48 EST:
BOSTON GOING BERSERK!

The Hub has gone insane. People are everywhere attacking other people and fighting in the streets. It's a madhouse out there. I don't know if anyone is still reading this little blog from the center of hell, but if they are I'm at 1 Boston Place on the 64th floor, condo 6414, and I want out of here. I can't pay much but I'll be eternally grateful. Until then, I'll keep bringing the news from downtown hell.

06/05/2076, 19:21 EST:
MYSTERIOUS AILMENT CONTINUES TO SPREAD

Still here, and sources are saying the insanity and violence are spreading. Medical facilities are erupting in violence as those who were suffering from the headaches and other symptoms earlier, are becoming homicidally violent. Medical personnel are evacuating the facilities and locking them down when they can, but not everyone in the facilities are suffering the same malady.

A contact out at Hamilton School, an offsite emergency care station for Whidden Memorial in Everett, said the facility seemed to erupt with a wave of violence almost all at once. He also stated that the physical attacks were accompanied by virtual attacks on the site's Matrix infrastructure. The power went out only moments after the first acts of physical violence and panic ensued.

My connections on the street are saying this "epidemic" is related to the terrorist attacks somehow, but I'm still waiting to hear how.

08/16/2075, 19:35 EST:
CORPORATE COURT CALLS EMERGENCY MEETING, AGAIN!

Oh my! The Corporate Court has called another emergency meeting. While the last resolved the issues of cross-corporate services usage vastly in favor of Lone

Star, this meeting will once again include representatives from the AA security corporation, but whatever favor they may have gained may get burned quickly. Amazing the changes twenty hours can bring.

Representatives from several other AA- and A-rated corporations with assets in and around Boston, including DocWagon and CrashCart, have also been asked to provide representation at this meeting. Again, I warn my readers that I may not be able to bring the results of this. I've had to run my filtering software every few minutes just to get access to the Public grid, and the Hub grid has been even spottier for me. Any info anyone can send my way would be appreciated.

Something big is going down in Beantown.

06/05/2076, 19:45 EST: PUBLIC GRID GOES OFFLINE!!!

Looks like the first edict of the CC is shutting down communications. The connections to the Public grid of the city of Boston have been severed. The Hub grid is still running as you can tell, but it looks like the powers that be do not want anyone talking to folks in Boston or vice versa.

I'm not sure what this will mean for the massive number of services that use the Public grid for data transmission and monitoring, but we'll see in the next few hours how GridGuide and HarborGuide function over the limited local grid.

On the streets the panic is beginning to set in, and the only thing keeping riots from exploding on the streets are, oddly enough, all the once-normal-people-now-turned-violent-crazies that keep popping out of the woodwork, keeping everyone on edge and indoors. If you have the means, it might be time to get out of Beantown for a while. If you're not already on the way out.

- That's the last from the NeoNET datastore. The rest were pulled from the upload we're digging through.
- Slamm-0!

06/05/2076, 22:18 EST: CORPORATE COURT AND UCAS GOVERNMENT DECLARE QUARANTINE AROUND BOSTON IN THE NEMA

Another CC meeting is going on and my sole remaining connection, an astral pal named Seeker, says that the UCAS government also has a representative at the meeting. Something real is going on here. Not that I didn't already know this, but right now I think I could be a firsthand witness to another Chicago Containment Zone-level event. The violence on the streets below is fading into the darkness of night. Don't know if it will stay that way or pick up again when things get truly black.

This will be a long dark night, the first of many I'm sure. Hopefully those out there reading my words will take comfort in knowing you are not alone. Hold true and wait for the light of morning.

06/05/2076, 23:55 EST: BIG TEN GO BLACK

And the hits keep coming. Only moments ago I was in the middle of talking to a friend at the NeoNET Towers and discussing her thoughts on this whole thing, when all of a sudden she's gone. Not just dropped from the commcall, but gone from the Matrix, and so are the Matrix hosts for all the megacorps in town. We have been left with only the Hub grid, without any connection to the outside world.

Who am I even talking to at this point?

06/05/2076, 23:59 EST: BOSTON QUARANTINE

And there it is! Lockdown. The city of Boston and its surrounding neighborhoods, towns, villages, and districts will be officially severed from the rest of the world at midnight. First our access to the Public grid was cut off, then travel was limited, and now we'll be officially left to fend for ourselves in whatever insanity has taken over the people here in Beantown.

Official announcements state that the quarantine is due to a "virulent strain of encephalitis." Officials state that the brain swelling led to the production of hormones that resulted in a marked increase in anger and aggression, a decrease in higher-level, rational, brain function, a decrease in pain threshold, and a constant low-lying sense of hunger.

The announcement didn't state how long the quarantine would be in effect, but it did mention that supply drops would begin by midnight and citizens should coordinate with their community leaders to work on supply distribution and follow the schedules to minimize excessive supply drain due to panic eating.

Know what I say to that?

Who the fuck is my community leader? How am I supposed to get to any supplies that get dropped on the streets with all the crazies running around? How long are they expecting us to be in here if they are planning supply drops within hours of the start of a quarantine?

Is anybody out there? When will the insanity end?

At least any loyal Bostonians with Hub grid access can still enjoy my blog. It has officially rolled over into midnight. The witching hour, when we receive our official severance package from society. It doesn't feel much different than it did a minute ago, but as I look back over my posts I feel we have been working toward this since early this morning.

My scant reports indicate that corporate forces are consolidating at strongpoints and valuable locations while they leave the rest of the city to the mad masses.

I'm not surprised, but as an outsider I've always kind of thought the corporations think of us as assets and not people anyway. Time to cut the losses and protect their real assets—their products and facilities.

I have accepted that it is unlikely that I will be rescued from my tower. I have food for a while, and I found the gold plated Predator II that my dad earned during his time as a mercenary in the Desert Wars. It looks ridiculous but it fires (dad just had to try it out). I'll be up here hiding if anyone wants to deliver a pizza or some extra supplies from one of those supply drops I can see falling to the ground now.

What a joke.

06/06/2076, 09:12 EST: A FOGGY BOSTON MORNING

I was hoping to wake to a beautiful new day with an end to the crazy escalation, and instead I wake to a bleak grey fog hanging outside my windows and NO POWER. According to one of my night-owl neighbors, the fog rolled in around 0200 and completely enveloped the city. Conspiracy theorists are going to be all over the fog as a tool of the government and corps, but anyone from Boston won't be too surprised by a foggy morning.

The truly disturbing news is the claims coming in from a few folks out there posting to my blog about walls being built. Walls? Seriously? This really is the CCZ all over again. I haven't seen any insect spirits, but then again in this fog I can't even see the next tower over from my window.

And the announcements from this morning that the quarantine was in full effect by 0100, only an hour after it began, makes everything from yesterday seem even more suspicious. I wish I'd been able to see this coming. Maybe I could have run.

I'll need to preserve my 'link's power to be able to keep it running connected to the mesh network that's already forming. Hopefully others have the same idea, or without power the whole thing will fall apart in short order.

REPORTS FROM ALLISON SANBORN

06/06/2076, 00:05 EST: AIR, RAIL, AND WATERWAYS DECLARED LOCKED DOWN

[Begin Transcription] Reporting live from outside the newly created Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Zone, this is Allison Sanborn bringing you the breaking news as it happens.

The Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Security Coalition has officially declared air and rail travel locked down just five minutes into the official quarantine. Statements made by Colonel Laura Bosco of the NEMAQSC indicate that limitations placed on air and rail travel earlier in the day during an emergency drill exercise made that aspect of the quarantine easy to lock down.

There are those who find that mysteriously well-timed drill exercise to be a cover for earlier knowledge of events to come in Boston, but Colonel Bosco has assured us it was a very fortunate coincidence that this drill occurred today. The epidemic could have spread all along the eastern seaboard had the drill not been going on today.

The coalition is looking to have the roads locked down within the hour, also thanks to the drill, but has had a greater level of difficulty with roving go-gangs and criminal shadowrunners pressing their forces.

Stay tuned for breaking news from the northeast. This is Allison Sanborn, live from the quarantine.

- I love the difference between what they feed the outside and the inside. The time stamps are way off between the two, and it looks like they are just keeping the inside totally in the dark while they weave a story on the outside. Corporate PR skill at its finest.
- Sunshine

06/06/2076, 00:15 EST: BOSTON BLACKED OUT!!

[Begin Transcription] Allison Sanborn back on the air. In an effort to help calm the populace and keep them inside their homes, the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Security Coalition has cut non-essential power to the quarantine zone. Water services and secure facilities are still receiving limited power, and megacorporate facilities with backup power are still lit up. The rest of the QZ, however, is dark. I have Captain Arlin Montgomery of the UCAS Army here to answer a few questions.

Q: Captain Montgomery, thank you for taking the time to speak to us on this busy night.

A: It's my pleasure Miss Sanborn. I'm a big fan and happy to help the people understand what's going on here.

Q: Captain, what is the thinking behind blacking out the area?

A: With limited access to power, citizens are more likely to stay put. Studies show that a population without power at night is a stagnant population. It's been the case throughout history. As night falls and the blackness descends on cities, law-abiding populations don't travel. That's what we are doing here. Giving the people a reason to stay inside where it's safe and wait until morning to travel.

Q: Interesting. Now, what about criminal elements? Shadowrunners love to operate at night, and we live in a time

where dark things haunt the blackness. Are these factors taken into consideration?

A: Well Allison, the funny thing is, shadowrunners operate in the shadows, but there are no shadows in the blackness of true night. Shadowrunners operate in the perpetual shadows of cities that run 24-7. They may try to work in the night, but they will find the darkness much less forgiving than the shadows. As for other criminal elements, we expect some of them to attempt action during the night, but most of their actions will be against other criminals in an attempt to use this event to consolidate power. And honestly, criminals killing criminals isn't much of a crime to me. [Short laugh]

Q: I couldn't agree more. Thank you for your time Captain. Good luck and stay safe.

A: It was my pleasure. Hopefully we can have another interview when all this ugliness is over.

Q: Everyone out there, this is Allison Sanborn coming to you live from outside the Quarantine Zone.

06/06/2076, 00:25 EST:
MAJOR HIGHWAYS DECLARED LOCKED DOWN BY NEMAQSC

[Begin Transcription] No rest for the wicked it seems. The Security Coalition has announced that all the major highways involved with the quarantine have been locked down and cleared of travelers and go-gangs. The Security Coalition has had to use deadly force to redirect the go-gangers, but they eventually learned their lessons and moved their activities to the highways within the zone instead of the perimeter highways.

With that step complete, control over the rest of the roads shouldn't be far behind.

06/06/2076, 00:40 EST:
ALL GROUND TRAVEL LOCKED DOWN BY NEMAQSC

[Begin Transcription] You'd think I was psychic. Allison Sanborn back at NEMAQSC HQ and happy to report all vehicular ground travel is locked down. Travel into and out of the QZ is only possible on foot through rural routes, and those paths are heavily patrolled. It looks like the quarantine will be locked down even sooner than expected. Way to go Security Coalition!

For those of you out there watching me give the play by play, be sure to follow the Coalition's security protocols and don't try to come to Boston to contact a loved one. Keep clear of the QZ border and let the Security Coalition do its job. They'll have everything under control soon enough, and then we can all rest easy as the threat will be contained, and we can start the important work of getting our loved ones out.

06/06/2076, 01:12 EST:
FIRST ASTRAL CASUALTY?

[Begin Transcription] Allison Sanborn here reporting on the recent news from the QZ. Despite numerous warnings and posting on the Public grid, it seems the first astral casualty of the quarantine has occurred. The astral form of a projecting mage violated the boundaries of the astral quarantine. The mage was followed by a spirit into the QZ astral, where the mage disrupted the spirit. Other spirits were on the scene in moments, along with the astral form of the summoner of the violently disrupted spirit. The astral intruder refused to leave and refused to surrender to the authorities. He attacked the Security Coalition forces, and in the ensuing struggle the mage was astrally disrupted.

Security Coalition forces traced the mage's physical location and contacted authorities in that area. The Zone Defense Force of Denver found him dead inside his home. The individual was not identified and is believed to be a shadowrunner due to the number of false identities and unlicensed materials in his home.

The troubles of the QZ are spreading around the world. I implore those out there to leave this work to the Security Coalition and don't try to take it into your own hands. This is a serious matter, not for amateurs.

- This poor sap wasn't a runner. He was a paid gopher for GW. The dragon tried to make a connection with his kin, and this sucker paid the price. Odds are he wasn't even really the first. The Wilds around Boston are crawling with very unpleasant spirits that seem to be only vaguely controlled. Sanborn is putting a pretty face on an ugly problem.
- Winterhawk

06/06/2076, 04:01 EST:
ARE THEY WALLING THEM IN?

[Begin Transcription] This is Allison Sanborn [yawn] reporting live from outside the QZ. Recent reports have been coming in from unconfirmed and unverifiable sources that walls are being constructed around the QZ. I've taken this question to the Security Coalition forces here, and they say the rumors are completely untrue.

SC forces state that certain areas are being reinforced to allow manpower to move to more volatile and difficult-to-monitor areas. Construction in these areas of additional fencing and barricades could easily be mistaken for walls. The SC still plans to release a full report of their accomplishments in the morning, and I'll be right there in the front to ask them the tough questions.

06/06/2076, 05:14 EST:
BOSTON FOG HINDERING LOCKDOWN

[Begin Transcription] It's as thick as pea soup out here. This is Allison Sanborn reporting live from the QZ as the fog thickens. Security Coalition forces are being forced to increase their reliance on technology as the fog rolls in all over the NEMA. Boston is not only blacked out, but a thick fog has rolled in off the ocean and blanketed the area to the point of zero visibility.

I can honestly say that my cameraman is nothing but a brightly lit fog-bank in front of me, and I'm sure he actually can't see me. Proven by the fact that I am now reporting from behind him.

This fog is going to make the job tougher for the Security Coalition, and hopefully it will not allow the quarantine to be broken. Reports of the virulent encephalitis and its extreme level of contagiousness were already coming from around Boston before the QZ was established.

Anyone suffering any of the reported symptoms of the encephalitis, please report to Doc Wagon and await pickup by secure transport.

06/06/2076, 05:25 EST:
ALL GROUND TRAVEL RESTRICTED BY NEMASC

[Begin Transcription] Allison Sanborn, live from the QZ. Despite the intense fog, the Security Coalition has officially announced that all access to and from the QZ has been secured. Lockdown is fully in effect.

This did not come easy. According to Security Coalition forces, the fighting in the wild areas was intense and extensive. Foot traffic tried to exit through forested routes and met unrelenting security forces.

As of 0525 hours Eastern Standard Time, the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine is officially in full lockdown. Thanks go out to the members of the Security Coalition who have so diligently worked on our behalf through the wee hours of the morning.

06/06/2076, 06:45 EST:
BLOODY BOSTON (DEATH TOLL AT 121)

[Begin Transcription] Good morning, this is Allison Sanborn reporting live from just outside the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Zone. For those of you unable to catch our broadcasts yesterday, we are sad to report that the city of Boston and a large chunk of the NEMA surrounding the city have been placed under strict quarantine conditions after an outbreak of viral encephalitis.

Reports link the outbreak to a violent anti-metahuman organization known as the Human Nation. Reports are sketchy, but the group apparently infiltrated a lab facility at the MIT&T campus and were attempting to use

the lab to mass produce the virus. The plot was discovered by Damon, the famous playboy dragon of Boston, who attacked the facility but was repelled by a coalition of forces on the premises and forced to flee in a confused state.

Damon, still under some deleterious effects, attempted to get into the NeoNET Towers for help but was stopped by security forces. He then attempted to fly away and crashed into the Green Monster at Fenway Park, but eventually regained flight and has since disappeared, though he is believed to still be within the Quarantine Zone.

The dragon inadvertently aided the terrorist organization by spreading their viral plague while he fled from their assault.

As it stands the death toll inside the quarantine zone has reached the triple digits. Seventy-eight metahumans (fifty-one orks, seventeen elves, seven trolls, and three dwarves) have died from complications of encephalitis; thirteen people have died in accidents related to encephalitis; twenty-four people have died while trying to force their way out of the quarantine; and six humans have died as a result of the encephalitis that was supposedly designed to only affect metahumans. This does not include anyone who may have died in incidents of street violence that have been reported in the city, as reports of those incidents are, as of this moment, unreliable and unconfirmed.

Efforts will continue throughout the day to help those inside cope with the stress of quarantine. Adding to the complications is the fog that rolled in last night and has not let up, creating an extremely tense environment within the city.

- Seriously, 121? Great cover-up. The number is probably closer to 121,000 but I guess those are the "unconfirmed" dead that were burned off in hospital incinerators or otherwise disposed of unseen. Really? Seventy-eight victims of the fake encephalitis. Do they not count the people these wacked-out nutters killed? We'll never get real numbers, but I'm sure they're through the roof. The population in the QZ is probably over six million easy, not counting the SINless. I would imagine we're talking about 0.1 percent casualties after a single day, which is about six thousand people. And it's only going to get worse.
- Bull

LOCKING THE HUB

- We've been through the QZ grand tour and it looks good to us, so it's loaded up to wrap up this section. This wasn't written by one of our normal posters, but it does a decent job of painting life on the inside. I put it last for a reason—get the foundation first before you jump over there.

  Before you get to that (though I know a bunch of you are skipping ahead right now), I pulled over that report Bull got from Miles Lanier from a few weeks back that I'll link up here. That covers some of the big projects he was looking into. I'm still surprised he is giving us data, but I'm not looking that gift horse in the mouth, though I have been checking everything he sends very carefully to make sure we aren't getting totally played as pawns. (It's a given we are, but I'd like to limit it if I can.) Comment away on that one as well.

  I'm balancing this out with something I had Netcat and Slamm-0! put together. It's a little look at what the media has been feeding us about this disaster. We can try to take a look at this through the eyes of the average citizen so we know what the sheeple think and what we need to do to keep them in the dark or bring them into the light—whichever serves our purposes at the moment.

  I'm going to pile up the bad news near the end. Hopefully, everyone got my message and has been working on the project. You can upload to me anytime and I'll slide it into this piece. For those who didn't get a request, it's some briefs on folks we think are on the inside. We don't know what's happened to them, and some we don't really care, but it's a look at some possible power players on the inside and potential power vacuums that could need filling around the NEMA. I know you all might have even more folks who you know or are worried about being missing inside the QZ but please keep this post clean. I've already opened up another forum for Missing in the QZ [link], so keep that stuff over there and use this for JP members and power players who we haven't heard from since the curtain came down.

  Last, as I said, is the journal we received. I'll leave it for you all to discover yourselves. It wanders at times and gets a little more personal than we probably need here and there, but none of us really felt right about cutting it down. We have another forum [link] for comments on this to keep the file from getting cluttered. We know people will want to discuss what's going on.
- Glitch

THE COVER-UP: NEWS SO FAR ON THE QUARANTINE

POSTED BY: NETCAT AND SLAMM-0!

I'll give Slamm-0! some credit—he helped me hunt down all sorts of data and even helped narrow it down, but his writing credit ends there and I'm formally protesting his name on the top this article. Honestly, I asked him after we were done which corp was leading the quarantine and he didn't even know. He didn't read any of the articles and he didn't write this. Okay, done complaining. Down to business.

- Thanks, honey. I told you, I can't read anything about Boston. It hurts too much. The BoSox may not have been my favorite team, but it's a sad tragedy for all sports fans. I'll link up the article for anyone who might have missed it. It also might be related, so I did something.
- Slamm-0!

Every news firm and agency covering the quarantine in the Boston region of the Northeastern Metroplex Axis (NEMA) has their story lined up. The few times the fringe agencies have made claims of late-breaking news from the inside or the truth behind the cover-up, nothing ever pans out. There's a lot of hype and no evidence. We all know why this is. Us.

We—more specifically, people like us—have been the reason that this cover-up has been so successful. Runners make sure nothing coming from the inside gets leaked, and they get paid well to shut down those fringe news agencies and steal all their data, crash their systems, or just disappear their reporters. I'm no fan of letting the governments and megacorporations tell everyone what to do, but I'm also even less of a fan of total anarchy and a world full of scared people lashing out because of fear. What I would've liked to see was a

more concerted effort by our kind to get the real scoop while we were helping the cover-up, but shadowrunners working together seems best done in small groups. Trust is hard to come by in the shadows.

What the news agencies have been reporting on is an outbreak of a very dangerous and genetically modified viral encephalitis. The viral encephalitis is supposedly being caused by genetically modified versions of the henipa viruses that were designed to target metahumans. The news is laying the blame on three radical groups: the Knights of the Red Branch, the Human Nation, and Alamos 20K, all working in concert. Alamos and the KRB are well-known metahuman hate groups, and the Human Nation is being pulled into the mix as a secretive organization of powerful metahuman-hating aristocrats funding these other more radical groups.

We've heard of all three of these groups and we know the current issues facing the Human Nation in the wake of the dragon war. Powerful strings must be getting pulled behind the scenes to get fingers pointing in that direction and rip the lid off that secret society. As for the other two, they make great local scapegoats.

Since the infection is affecting humans as well, the story goes that the virus had an unexpected side effect, and instead of just targeting and killing metahumans as the evil conspirators designed it, the virus had unforeseen side-effects on the human population. If and when the quarantine is ever lifted, the actual statistics inside the zone will certainly not match up with the news, but I'm sure someone will come up with more spin to make it work. Probably meaning more work for us to alter facts and data, or just quiet down those with the loudest opposing voices.

According to the news, the virus is highly contagious in all metatypes. It supposedly doesn't kill quickly in most cases and can gestate for unknown periods of time. This means the people inside the QZ aren't being allowed to leave for fear of spreading the virus, even if they don't show signs or symptoms. It's all a bunch of hooey, but they've sold the story to the sheep, and no one from the inside is getting any word out to say anything different. There's work to be had keeping up the front, but not near as much as there is trying to get data from the inside. The former is far safer.

- The whole thing is really creating a lot of support for pro-metahuman groups that focus on how terrible it was that their people were targeted. At least some good is coming from this.
- 2XL

WHO'S ON THE WALL

The Quarantine Zone is being supported and controlled by a coalition of corporate forces. The Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Security Coalition (NEMAQSC—they clearly didn't think about the acronym in advance) was put together by the Corporate Court and the UCAS government. It includes forces from not only the Big 10 megacorps but a number of AA and A corps that have interests along the eastern seaboard of the UCAS, as well as forces from the UCAS military. The CC is saying they stepped in to help out due to the danger of this infection spreading through the rest of the NEMA. They claim they were worried about the people, but we all know it was about Manhattan and threatening the ECSE as well as other megacorporate holdings all over the NEMA. The UCAS hasn't commented other than to say they are happy to be working alongside the Corporate Court in this sad endeavor.

According to the CC, the quarantine went into full effect and lockdown on June 7th at 0001, but not much moved in or out of the city after 5th. Boston's city Grid, The Hub, as well as the local public grid and all local connections to the Big 10's grids went offline for the lockdown on the 5th to "hunt down the terrorists." They have yet to come back up. Flights stopped leaving, ships were ordered to stay in the harbor, and all the trains in the area were shut down.

Stories varied. The airport, HarborGuide, GridGuide, and train systems all claimed malfunctions that stalled traffic out even before the lockdown was ordered, but the end result was the same: Nobody was leaving. Right now the plan has had a little bit of backfire as the world seems to be focusing more on how all those systems can all go down at the same time in this new safer Matrix than on the human tragedy that is unfolding around Boston. Our old friend Danielle de la Mar has already given multiple speeches on how this is just further proof that the hacker

and technomancer menace must be dealt with even more harshly, despite the already brutal effects we've seen when we "manipulate" the Matrix too much. Right now, it looks like those enhanced measures could be at work around Boston. GOD is coming down even faster on any hackers poking their noses into the efforts of the NEMAQSC forces. Let me break this down before I continue to rant.

- I've heard rumors of some sort of DarkTrix being run inside the QZ, but I haven't been able to substantiate it.
- Clockwork

- I've heard rumors of a Resonance doorway that will get you into the QZ and onto that DarkTrix. Oh wait, you wouldn't know anything about that, would you?
- Netcat

Every megacorp is playing a part in maintaining the quarantine, but it is all being coordinated by the CC. They are all overlapping their work by order of the CC so that no single corp has control of any single aspect of security or maintenance around the zone. They somehow think this will increase accountability and limit violations, but what they're getting is more corporate infighting and posturing (surprise!). I'll break it down by functions instead of corps so you can see the mix in each area.

LOGISTICS

Trying to coordinate a quarantine this large is a monumental task. With a land and water area around a thousand square klicks, along with the astral plane and the Matrix, coordinating this monstrosity has got to be the largest job of them all. Lead by the CC, this force also includes personnel from Mitsuhama, Shiawase, NeoNET, and Ares, along with government researchers contracted through the UCAS government.

The CC personnel hold the top spots that give final approval for everything. They're the faces of the logistics team when they need someone to go in front of the media. They're also the scapegoats that take the fall for any failures in the QZ. Two members of this group have already been put on the chopping block due to the Quarantine Break incident during week two. I'm sure the rest are now aware of their precarious positions and are certainly taking more time looking over the files that cross their commlinks. Well, that and preplanning their escape route if they get thrown to the wolves.

The rest of the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Logistics Coalition (NEMALC) actually handles the heavy lifting. MCT leads the way and has been at the forefront of quarantine coordination from very early on. If I were a conspiracy theorist, I'd say they might have known something like this was going to happen, but I'm not. They also have large amounts of experience in disaster coordination from events back home in Japan, trying to contain problems in Tsimshian, as well as the efforts they deliver all over the Pac-Rim to island nations that get hit with outbreaks or other natural disasters.

- Outbreaks they cause.
- Mihoshi Oni

- Whether they cause it or not, they have good containment plans. I know first hand how tough an MCT lockdown can be to break from some work near the Philippines back in '71.
- Kane

UCAS medical personnel are pretty much hanging around for show to keep the UCAS citizens feeling comfortable. They help coordinate some of the research efforts and have provided some key insight points on maintaining a quarantine in a rural environment. Their insights are actually saving lives, since MCT originally just applied their Zero-Zone policy to the rural areas and left drones to shoot anything moving that was larger than a raccoon and not broadcasting a NEMAQSC ID. It was an ugly first few weeks.

Ares is offering their quarantine expertise from the days of Chicago. They give most of their advice behind the scenes since the UCAS government and most of its citizens don't really trust the megacorp at the moment. They managed to contain the bugs back then and no one's set off a nuke in downtown Boston yet, so I guess they've improved their tactics. Seriously, they know their shit, so the rest of the logistics team listens when they talk. I'd expect a little more visibility if the quarantine goes well as they try to mend their image in the UCAS.

NeoNET is on the logistics team because they have personnel on every coalition group. They're the hometown boys, they like to be involved, and they know the most about the region. It makes the whole thing more personal for them, and for now the CC is considering that a positive. If NeoNET starts doing anything irrational, I imagine the other members will be saying they're too emotionally involved and will lobby to get them off the team.

Shiawase seems to have a part here for no other reason than to keep an eye on the others. On the surface they have a big part to play with the energy supply in the region, and I guess that could be the reason they're included, but they haven't been very visible and don't seem to be doing much of anything.

- That's never a good sign. It's always the quiet ones who explode on you.
- Plan 9

- A famous comedian once did a skit about that. I'll happily keep an eye out for the quiet ones, but I'll also be sure to pay good attention to the screaming motherfucker with the chainsaw and leave the quiet ones off in their quiet little corner.
- Kane

MATRIX SECURITY

NeoNET leads this (surprise, surprise), but the Matrix Security Coalition (MSC, or "Mask") is also under the watchful eye of the CC's Grid Overwatch Division (GOD). Though NeoNET makes a great public face, GOD is the swinging hammer that knocks the crap out of anyone nosing around the efforts of the NEMAQSC or the Quarantine Zone itself. Mitsuhama and Saeder-Krupp round out the group and provide most of the hardware and infrastructure for the jammers and satellite blinders.

GOD has tightened the Matrix restrictions on the NEMAQSC Grid and what's left of the NEMA public grid. Nothing links into the Quarantine Zone anymore, and even the Big 10 Grids aren't allowed to access their Boston assets. No one has made a big public stink about that even though it's really suspicious. The PR team is doing a great job keeping everyone from asking why there's a communications blackout for a medical quarantine. Just make sure to keep the Baby Monitor running if you're trying to dig around in that region.

MAGICAL SECURITY

I don't know much about astral or arcane security, but I find it really interesting. That made this material by far the most interesting stuff for me to pour through. Heading up the Arcane Security Coalition (ASC, or "Ask") is Manadyne. The AA corp is "supported" by a trio of very unhappy AAAs: Aztechnology (AZT), Mitsuhama (MCT), and Wuxing. I shouldn't say a trio; AZT and MCT have their feathers in a ruffle because they have to play second chair to a AA, but Wuxing seems to be taking it all in stride, same way they seem to take everything.

Manadyne's lead has been very by the book. They've requested every magical asset capable of summoning to do so every sunrise and sunset and give their spirits specific orders that change with each summoning. This method has meant both a constant astral security force and a variable force in different areas. Forces attempting to gain access to the QZ via the astral may do a little recon run and find a simple watcher, but the next cycle could have a powerful guardian spirit there when they do their run. Those twice-daily rituals are what provide the soft astral security, something to act as an alarm system for the other piece of the force.

The second big link in the chain comes from summoners who are capable (and willing, I might add) to perform binding rituals on spirits to extend their time and service. These spirits act as the first responders to the others' alarms. This is where the real danger comes in for astral intrusion. These spirits move fast and can come en masse to an alarm. Making this even more dangerous is the power of some of these forces. Quite a few corporate summoners have access to metamagic techniques that can call out some seriously powerful spirits. That makes attacking a watcher really risky, since a great form fire spirit might be the response. (I love Grimmy. He makes me sound like I have a clue what I'm talking about.)

Spirits aren't the only forces monitoring the quarantine zone. Astrally projecting magicians work in shifts patrolling the astral around the quarantine as well. Rumor has it some even get to go inside. These guys would be great to talk to just get a feeling of what it's like inside, but I'm sure they aren't running around advertising what they do. Or talking much to outsiders.

It's important to note that this security isn't only about keeping people out and the "infection" inside the QZ, but also keeping information in there as well. That means astrally projecting magicians and spirit messengers for magicians on the inside who are trying to get out are targeted by the ASC forces just as often as those trying to get in.

- I know a mage who took a contract to carry a message into the QZ on day two. Not a lot of info was out at that point, so he didn't think it would be a big deal. You can't catch encephalitis while projecting or manifesting, so he went. He's still in the hospital today—who or whatever hit him left him in a coma.
- Snopes

The ASC is also making extensive use of warding as part of their defenses. Much of this is to protect important areas from astral snooping, but some of it is to funnel access to certain points and block visibility on the astral. Since things don't look the same, hiding is done in a totally different fashion. It's more of an aura muffling or blending than the physical method of hiding behind things. Though that latter method works too, and it's what the ASC is utilizing in many places. Spirits and projecting magicians hide inside blinds. Approaching forms don't know who or what is behind the blinds until they pass by and suddenly find themselves mobbed.

We all know the nasty things that AZT is into (I was going to add a "supposedly" there, but we all know the score, right?). As part of the ASC, they aren't pulling out the sacrificial magic for the everyday kind of stuff, but they have been using it. Blood spirits have been reported by runner teams trying to make inroads through subterranean routes and wild areas. There are also rumors of people attempting to enter or leave the quarantine being grabbed by members of the AZT portion of the security force and never making it to the NEMAQSC holding facilities.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

The physical security aspect of this operation has been a nightmare. Though it is also, by far, the most visible aspect to the largest portion of the world. The section of the NEMA around Boston is densely populated at the coast and slowly thins as you move farther inland.

In order to setup and maintain a quarantine, the forces needed something they could use to stop people from trying to leave the area (or get in.) A lot of those "somethings" have been bodies of water. Rivers, lakes, and streams are all over the area, and those (combined with some quickly constructed walls and destroyed roads) helped to lock down the area. Since then, the majority of the boundary has been solidified along I-95 around most of the city. The forces arrayed over land, water, and air are a varied mix of corporate forces.

- These forces spent a lot of time in the first days of the quarantine glaring at each other instead of the walls. That's actually been the cause for all the near breakouts.
- Stone

LAND

The land defenses are actually being led by a non-corporate force. UCAS National Guard forces, along with their contracted advisors from the CDC, are in charge according to the official NEMAQSC information. The forces at their disposal come from Ares, Renraku, MCT, Aztechnology, Lone Star, NeoNET, and Saeder-Krupp. They all wear the NEMAQSC patch on their uniforms, but it's usually pretty easy to tell where they're originally from.

Ares offered advice (that the UCAS National Guard is happily ignoring) on how to run a quarantine from their experience in Chicago. But they were actually removed from the Security Coalition Council for a short period of time after the Brookline incident due to suspicion that they had a part in undermining the security in the area to make the National Guard look bad. They were cleared, but they've been stuck working every middle-of-nowhere spot the Guard can find for them since that time.

- Ares is pissed and bribable. They have been rumored to be the easiest way into the QZ. But it's a one-way trip. They don't want any more bad publicity, so they are as tight as everyone else on letting people out.
- Sticks

Renraku and MCT are working together to keep the roadways cleared and move traffic around the QZ in the smoothest ways possible. They also use this optimization to spot anyone who might be heading toward the zone or making multiple passes over the same area. MCT has thousands of drones in the air at any one time. These are the low flyers covering the ground. It doesn't even include the forces that the air guards have flying around. This mass of drones can be helpful if someone wants to get a look inside the zone with their own drone and can fake an MCT ID that can hold up for a short time. I wouldn't recommend trying to hack this network, but stupid people can try—and feel the wrath of GOD.

- I have 1.2 seconds of footage from that trip. It was worth it.
- Slamm-0!

Aztechnology and Lone Star have had their forces blended because someone thinks it's funny to have the Texas corp and the Azzies working together. They keep a close eye on each other, but the number of off-duty brawls that occur in the bars near their stations is off the charts. They're mostly assigned security in the rural and wild areas. Those areas are also where they have put all the holding facilities for people who try to get in. These places are full of distraught family members just trying to get in to see if their relatives are ok. Well, them and the runners who have tried to get in. These spots are popular targets for runs to breakout friends, assets, and even the occasional rich exec who got pinched and has the cash to get out. No one has been released from the holding facilities since they were assembled, and the official word is that no one will until the quarantine is lifted. Discussions have even been in the works to move these people to other facilities.

- I don't know if any of you caught the five-second news story about a mass breakout from a facility near Westwood. It happened about a week ago and was reported by a nosy KSAF reporter staking the place out. It got quickly covered up and the reporter is now MIA, but an entire holding facility escaped. The same facility has also been suffering a rash of illnesses that look a lot like CFD infection, which is what drew the reporter to the area. My speculation is a head case got themselves captured and then spread the infection to those around them. I could be wrong, but it's a tale of warning.
- Hannibelle

The urban security force is a mix of National Guard, Minuteman Security, Lone Star, and Knight Errant officers. These four blend together like oil, water, and gasoline—their integration is lacking, but they make one hell of a volatile and dangerous combination. NeoNET's Minuteman officers think they know everything about Boston and so do the Knight Errant officers who have been here for years, while the Lone Star officers think they know everything about everything. The National Guard officers in charge of all this spend most of their time trying to keep the infighting to a minimum while attempting to keep up the image of a unified force by putting members of different corps' forces into the same squads. It's a noble gesture and I'm sure it worked in basic training to get that sense of brotherhood, even between folks who may have hated each other for years, but this is the world of megacorporations. Those megas have as much identity as any nation, and the National Guard doesn't realize that their plan is not about members of the same nation getting along; it's more like putting members of enemy nations together. Silly national citizens.

The urban forces are deployed in seven-man squads to patrol the evacuation zones and keep the squatters out while also working the wall to keep people inside the zone. This aspect has been the hardest for the National Guard members. With the zero-zone policy in effect, they aren't even supposed to give a warning. Most of the time they do, and get reprimanded for it, but a lot of lives have been saved with those warnings.

- The Guard members actually have a running tally of the number of citizens they didn't have to shoot. It's kept quiet but others have heard and some of the more bloodthirsty corp officers have started shooting the citizens the Guard members warn. The situation on the wall has a lot of tension between the corpsec guys and the Guardsmen.
- Stone

- The report here is nice and all but it's missing one of the biggest stories of the quarantine: The way all of these people are watching each other. There have been numerous incidents of friendly fire covered up, and most of those were not actually friendly fire. They were members of the teams on the outside flipping sides for no apparent reason. Beyond the corporate rivalry here, there is something else going on. I'm not altogether sure this quarantine is as effective as they are trying to make it sound.
- Picador

- That would match some of the rumors I've picked up. Looks like the forces all around the wall are being tested and separated frequently. The tests are likely for infection, and most of the separations seem to be along local vs. non-local lines.
- Kane

Saeder-Krupp is the engineering corps for the land defense forces. They build the walls, bulldoze the roads, and tear down the buildings. They are responsible for fortifying the QZ and they are very good at it. They are also very good at deflecting attention from the fact that they are building fortifications around a city in quarantine for encephalitis. A lot of their work is done at night. Teams of S-K troops will clear a building during the day, and then the engineers come by at night and turn that building into a stretch of rubble wall. The next night another crew turns the rubble into a real wall. They've done quite a bit of work on the landscape of the Boston area in the past month.

WATER

Aquatic defenses have been interesting to watch. Everyone has been talking about and waiting for the moment the small force of UCAS naval vessels that are quarantined in the harbor might decide to make a run at the blockade. It hasn't happened yet, but everyone thinks it will. I hope it doesn't. That would be a serious waste of life, since the UCAS Navy and Yamatetsu Naval Force (compliments of Evo) have a small armada hanging around just outside the harbor waiting to squash any such run.

The harbor and the ocean are actually the easiest waterways to protect. Sonar buoys have been dropped in a line out in the water. The buoys are topped by dog-brained autocannon turrets with some decent radar systems set to warn anything they detect via comm message and loudspeaker to turn back before they open fire. When the sonar detects anything it starts tracking and calls in nearby forces, which usually is a depth-charge-equipped cutter or an Osprey loaded with torpedoes. Rumors have it there are some hunter-killer subs in the area as well as droned subs but I have nothing to confirm those.

The tough part of the waterway protection is actually the rivers, streams, and lakes. Renraku and Aztechnology are the big force suppliers on the inland waterways. Both have famous small-boat divisions under their corporate umbrella, and they're using those divisions to supply themselves. Right now they are also setting up some subsurface monitoring systems in preparation for the winter. When it gets cold and everything freezes, a well-equipped diver could go under the ice on one side of a lake and pop up in a side stream or even a well-hidden inlet. It's possible that could happen now, but the boats on patrol are all running some nice sonar equipment, so it's probably a little tough to pull off.

- Not to mention the bubbles. The diver would need a rebreather setup to prevent their bubble trail giving them away. I can't imagine those are very common in Boston.
- Kane

Droned sensors have been used extensively along the rivers and streams to warn nearby forces of anything strange. In the more rural areas the troops that check these out have been eating a lot of venison when they find the sensors tripped by deer. Many of the sensors in those areas are inside the Quarantine Zone to give units time to respond. Installation of those sensors involved quite a few incidents early on, including members of the Guard and even local corporate forces slipping away into the QZ.

AIR

The entire Quarantine Zone is a militarized flight zone. The only flights allowed to cross the airspace, which extends about twenty miles past the land-based edges, are authorized military and corporate flights. Even most of the supply drops, mainly run by Renraku and Ares, are done from altitude near the edge of this area, taking advantage of the prevailing winds to push the supplies into the zone. Those are general supply drops,

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As if the quarantine wasn't enough, Boston has taken yet another blow. At 2043 EST, the Boston Red Sox private plane crashed into Lake Huron on its return flight from Minneapolis with the whole team onboard. Between players, coaches, and flight crew, ninety-six souls were lost. Flags all over the NEMA, already at half-staff for the events of the quarantine, will be flown with a Red Sox pennant below them.

Following yesterday's brawl-ridden, home-run-fest of a game, the Boston Red Sox boarded their private plane. They were headed home before a three-game home stand to be played on the field of the Brockton Bombers, one of the Boston's AAA clubs. After that they were supposed to head back out on the road while more permanent facilities were considered. Though they couldn't go all the way home due to the quarantine, they were still planning to spend time with fans in Worcester, Massachusetts. Media spots to discuss the events of Thursday were already being planned for today, and some may still be held to provide updates as the news slowly spreads across the region.

The BoSox front office is scrambling to bring up players from their AAA clubs in an attempt to still field a team for the remainder of the season. No one will expect much from this squad, but I'm sure they won't let the fans down with how hard they play. Due to limitations on travel to and from the region, the players may still not be available for the game Monday afternoon, but the Sox have said they are willing to hand the Tigers a few free wins if they have to forfeit Monday and Tuesday. They are sure they can get the new team together by Wednesday.

This has been a wild week for the BoSox. With the dragon crashing into the Green Monster at Fenway on Thursday and the brawls during yesterday's game, this tragedy came while all eyes were already looking their way.

It's a sad day in baseball.

- They were playing the Tigers when the dragon crashed. The Tigers have had a turbulent few days too. Players collapsing on the field. A brawl when Silvano got beaned. Left-handed reliever Javier Folini is in the hospital with migraines. This all sounds very CFD-like to me.
- Slamm-0!

- That's a very fast onset time. Either they got hit with a massive number of nanites, they all have secret cyber or nano systems, or the virus is acting faster than usual.
- Butch

intended for the average citizens. Corporate supply drops have been allowed to fly into the zone and make drops right where they need them. According to the official NEMAQSC records, three of these trips have resulted in crashes when the craft were attacked.

Much of the air security is provided by drones, mostly launched and maintained from a fleet of Skyswimmer airships. The airships have been fitted with Suncell tech to provide power, which is especially useful given the power needs of all the drones they're hauling. They currently have the best kind of air force: one that is always in the air. That's not to say they don't have other craft at the ready. Aztechnology has brought in a dozen of their small Firebrand fighters to assist, and the National Guard's Air Corps has four Eagle Cs on loan from the Air Force. I'm also quite sure the regular UCAS Air Force is staying on ready alert in the area just in case the situation gets out of hand. Or *more* out of hand.

Armed and transport helicopters are constantly buzzing all around the edge of the Quarantine Zone. They fly low and run wall patrols as well as move materials and men to areas for construction. The transports are usually escorted by a flight of drones. The more drones, the more valuable whatever is on board usually is. While S-K handles most of the materials moving, Ares and the Guard Air Corps usually provide support, and Renraku usually moves supplies around. There are ground- and water-based air defense weapons around as well, but most of the time they are kept out of sight. It tends to frighten the locals to see those kinds of arms deployed in a situation like this. Plus it doesn't match the encephalitis outbreak cover story.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

And speaking of cover stories, let's look at the group that keeps busy inventing new ones: NEMAQSC, the face of the organization. Somehow this area isn't split between any megas. The PR team consists of the CC faces that get put in front of the cameras and the Aztechnology minds behind the scenes. I would have expected to see Horizon here, but those two had some serious issues with each other during the Az-Am war and I'm sure the bad blood is still pumping.

That's not to say Horizon isn't around. Since the two PR megas don't share resources, often a report on the same issue from different perspectives will come out. Sometimes they even report contradicting stories and then have to go back to spin some PR magic to explain the difference.

What the Azzie PR machine is doing well though, is keeping the masses calm and full of hope. Every few days there's a new story about a possible cure and a bright glimpse at what's happening inside. The stories rise and fall in popularity, and the corp makes sure to include follow-ups on failed plans and the terrible results of tests on mice. It's all made up, though. No one is re-

ally looking for a cure for this encephalitis bug, but the stories keep the majority of folks outside the QZ happy and hopeful.

THE UNWAVERING TRUTH

BY: MILES LANIER

I'm still here. Fraggin' surprised aren't ya. Me too. It hasn't been pleasant, and the longer it goes on the worse it gets, but I'm not one to quit. I've compiled all of my data on what the big players were doing in Boston before all this drek went down and the whole place had to be cut off like a festering limb. Since the quarantine went up, I've been as blind as you. I'll give them credit on that. They did one hell of a job cutting that place off from the rest of the world.

Let's get down to business before I have an episode. Before the quarantine we had four major players working on three major projects, though one of them is a merger of two major previous endeavors. The four players are Aztechnology, Evo, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies, and NeoNET. That's alphabetical order, not the order of how involved or powerful they are or anything else.

I wanted to get down to business, but I have something to say first. I am a head case. The term has caught on in other private sector areas too, especially after Butch's work fell into megacorporate hands. I'm not lost to my demons yet, though. I am still fighting, but the virus has made some changes to my regular personality. I find myself arranging things strangely, and extremely interested in the order of things. It must have something to do with the personality fighting for real estate in my head. The upshot is that sometimes I don't even realize what I'm doing when I do it.

The connected projects aren't all I have, and since this place is as good as any to dump off data I've collected that's useless to me but might be useful to others, it's included at the end. Just a few small pieces I put together before declaring there were no connections. After reading I'm sure you'll be able to tell what drew me to them in the first place.

PROJECT ABYSS (MCT)

This is the most disconnected of the three big projects, but it was operating out of Boston. More specifically out of the former East Coast Stock Exchange building in the Hub. From what I managed to gather, this program was being lead by Dr. Penelope Ann Xavier, who I also linked to Project Vulcan. Its primary focus seemed to be studying the aftereffects or any continuing effects of the Dissonance Pool that was formed back in the Crash of '64.

The program was connected to snatch teams all over the world. Their primary targets were always technomancers. The changeover of the grids only made their job easier, since the only hackers to really maintain their skills early on were the technomancers who adapted to the new grid most quickly. Before the cyberdecks started getting into the hands of regular hackers—now called deckers—there were individuals who were still pulling off some crazy jobs, even in the new test grids. Yeah, at first everyone was stymied, but the TMs were quick to adapt. Meanwhile, the egos of the überhackers always get them in trouble. They still wanted the world to know who was getting to them and freeing the data, but their newfound clumsiness left trails for snatch teams looking to grab them. They were reckless, but that's the defining characteristic of many of the world's best hackers.

The program seems to be focusing primarily on the connection of technomancers to their Resonance while in proximity to an area of Dissonance while examining whether they can gain power faster through connection to the latter. I'm only a novice in this area, but it seems as if Dissonant TMs are capable of faster, more powerful feats of hacking than their Resonance-following kin. The problem is that from all the reports I've seen, touching the Dissonance is a one-way trip to nutterville. Dissonant TMs become erratic, reclusive, and explosively violent. That's a dangerous combination when you're talking about a group that can develop the power to fry electronics with their minds.

Project Abyss may not be related, but there are a few scientists connected to it who were also connected to MCT's CyTech Program. For those not in the know, this was a program working to develop cyborg technomancers. While it was under the umbrella of MCT, the program had its share of problems. The subjects were able to develop a significant Resonance connection despite very little biological integrity, but their minds couldn't hold up for long. I mention this here because there were several cytech sightings in Boston prior to the quarantine. The difference was, these cytechs were all connected to NeoNET, and they seemed more mentally stable then the earlier MCT renditions. Whether NeoNET has made strides in this direction or just did a good job of keeping up appearances is an open question.

The only connection I've been able to make is some of the scientists involved and the presence of the cytechs, but I have no updates based on what's happening inside the QZ since the walls went up. There are interesting possibilities, since we all know this whole thing is screaming CFD.

Project Abyss may have been part of an effort to use Dissonance or Resonance to alter, possibly even erase, the nanites carrying the CFD virus. Since the Dr. Xavier working on it has also been connected to Project Vulcan (see below), we may be looking at some cross-project contamination or potential double-dealings. Dr. Xavier would have to have a stern spine to be willing to double deal on a dragon. Then again, this is not the street, and the regular rules do not apply here.

PROJECT VULCAN (AZTECHNOLOGY, EVO, NEONET)

Project Vulcan is somehow connected to NeoNET's Project Imago and Evo's Dickens Program. While I've still found traces of the Dickens Program operating in other facilities, Project Imago seems to have completely folded into Project Vulcan. Both of the original programs were focused on artificial intelligences in all their forms. Different aspects of the study were focused on AI proliferation, others on AI generation, and some on AI reprogramming, but the cutting-edge stuff was the work they were doing on AI implantation and cognitive uploads. I know it's not polite to point fingers, but I will. I'd bank on the fact that these are the guys you can pin CFD on somehow, someway. I still haven't managed to dig up that proof—or at least I don't remember doing it—but just glancing through the files that these guys have on this stuff, well, it all just screams CFD. But that's not our focus here.

The overall goal of Project Vulcan seems to be the implantation of a specific AI into a specific subject. My data points to Cerberus/Neurosis as the AI (or e-ghost, in this case). That means the subject (who is only described with an ID code on all the files) is more than likely Eliohann. From what I can tell, early on they made sure this program went dark. Full security silence protocols, cleanup crew making sure no one leaked anything, and then all of a sudden, maybe a week before the quarantine, the traffic for the project ramped up beyond the capabilities of the network scrubbers. It was a sudden rush of work, data, and materials being moved around, and some of the data started to slip out. The cracks it slipped through were exploited, and I dug deeper to get this stuff.

If Project Vulcan was ramping up for a test of some kind and the recent rush led to mistakes, we may have the cause for our quarantine. The project data had several references to CFD as well, or at least head case test subjects and successful consciousness transfers. I'm not exactly sure if they were talking about head cases overwriting people or if they were referring to invasive personalities being transferred back out of the bodies they had stolen, but most of the wording I could get from the damaged files led me to believe the latter. It didn't say the status of the subjects after the invasive personalities left, so I don't know if it was looking like a cure. If it is, you can be sure there are contracts being arranged or already in action to get teams inside to retrieve the relevant data.

The listed head of the project is Cerberus, with Celedyr appearing as the NeoNET Project Lead. There are a larger-than-average number of memos and data transfers with Celedyr's claw marks on them, so he must have been keeping aware of the project, if not actively involved in the research.

- This is the project Butch found out stuff on back in the *Stolen Souls* data dump. The one with the memo on Celedyr having lunch with some ballsy pencil pusher. In fact, I remember Dr. Xavier from that too. Has this project been going on that long?
- Picador

- Looks like it. I'm amused that Butch out-scooped Miles Lanier on this stuff. Way to go Butch!
- Slamm-0!

- I do remember seeing some similar data between the few pieces Butch gathered and my work. She is a resourceful and driven woman.
- Miles Lanier

- I always forget that we let you stick around to comment. I wonder why that is?
- Slamm-0!

- Memory lapses? Early sign of CFD infection?
- Miles Lanier

With the focused attention of Celedyr so intently directed at this project, I was not surprised to also find that the dragon's lairing habits had changed, and that he was spending the bulk of his time here instead of in his lair in Wales. The extensive damage the NeoNET facility in Caerleon suffered last year might also have something to do with it.

Project Vulcan is primarily based at MIT&T, but not in the regular labs. The three involved megacorps managed to invest enough money to get a big section of the labs near the river under their complete control. Judging by the number of construction contracts and purchase orders that flowed out through various channels, they did a lot of remodeling, including multiple backup power generators and supply systems, as well as extensive cool-storage facilities, and some rather specialized medical equipment, including a few pieces of veterinary equipment.

PROJECT DIABLO GARDISTO (AZTECHNOLOGY)

I only came upon the trail of this project after digging into Project Vulcan and finding the Aztechnology connection, which was quite a surprise. Project "Devil Guardian," as it translates, has some connections to Project Vulcan but only on the fringes of the operation. It has two main areas of interest: ley line formations beginning and growing in the Boston/Salem region and the study of dragon biology and related magical techniques.

It's that latter part that first created the connection. The research in this area was being sent to Project Vulcan for review. It's well known in the shadows that Az-

technology has a reputation for unique magical practices, and the study of draconic magical techniques isn't odd, except when you consider their anti-dragon stance to the public. But those two diametrically opposed concepts are simply connected by the well known phrase "Know thine enemy." Aztechnology's study of Dzitbalchén may be controversial, but it was definitely valuable. And from what I've seen, at least one dragon isn't holding them over the fire for it; instead, they're using what the Azzies found to help out their project. I'm sure that act isn't going to earn Celedyr any points with the rest of the dragons, but the not-so-well-known fact that Celedyr is the dragon's newest Loremaster at least gives him some authority to tell the rest of the dragons that his investigations are for the purposes of history. And who knows, maybe while the Azzies are this close to him Celedyr is getting some claws into the megacorp.

As for what I've seen in the files, it looks like the Azzies are giving a lot of data on dragon neural biology and getting more in return. They seem to have provided the foundation in the physiological side of things and have been gaining data on brainwave patterns and active neurochemistry. The subject data seems to be coming from the same subject as Project Vulcan—Eliohann, as I mentioned earlier. Celedyr seems to be allowing access to the comatose dragon for the Azzies to study.

Everyone might want to be ready for a flurry of operations when this all comes to a head and Celedyr wants the information out of the hands of Aztechnology. Right now I think it was all a relationship of convenience. Celedyr and company didn't have the baseline data that Aztechnology had, so they invited them into Project Vulcan with the enticing offer of more dragon study to save themselves years of research they really didn't have the tools to perform. As a bonus, Celedyr avoided getting his claws dirty by studying the corpse of a dragon or allowing the study of another dragon corpse by metahumanity.

Once I had gotten that connection I dug deeper into what Aztechnology was studying in their own project to see if it was of any value, or related to CFD in any way. It isn't, but it's interesting by its own right.

Aztechnology has been looking into dragon magic as part of their continued desire to protect themselves from the dragons of the world that they have universally pissed off, except maybe Celedyr and one other dragon (though I'm sure Big C's planning to fry them the instant he gets done using them). The other dragon they've been working with is Damon. Boston's own.

The younger dragon seems to be working with the Azzies in studying ley lines that are growing in power between Boston and Salem. These lines seem to have a distinctly draconic aspect to them, and Damon has been cultivating these lines ever since his settling in Boston. He's had numerous meetings with the witches up in Salem and attends their festivals regularly as if he were a follower of Wicca. According to a recent study, every visit to Salem during a festival seems to increase the power of the ley lines between the two cities.

I'm not a mage, but I've studied the basics of magical theory so I can understand what I may have to deal with in that area. I know that aspecting makes one particular group's arcane potential greater, possibly while hindering the magic capabilities of others. With this ley line aspected toward dragon magic, dragons gain power near it, meaning dragons may be more attracted to the area.

Damon may be using the Azzies to help further his goals of creating a domain, and in return he's providing them with astral viewings of his spellcasting techniques and a few of his draconic abilities. A lot of the research focused on methods for blocking draconic telepathic communication and trying to get non-dragons access to the power. They mentioned a close correlation to a low-level mind probe spell that skims and implants surface thought. I'm sure this research would have value for any corp that could get its hands on it, and it might weaken any leverage that Aztechnology develops from this research.

The research on the dragon ley line could have value to any corp as well, but would be even more valuable to the witches of Salem. They may be able to use it to counteract the effects and possibly prevent them from becoming the forced vassals of a dragon lord. I'm not saying those are Damon's plans—the area is not aspected towards Damon alone, but toward all dragons. It's possible that Damon is working under orders from one of the great dragons, possibly even Celedyr. If so, that could mean a new power might be planning to move to the East Coast of North America. With Ghostwalker's control of the FRFZ and his dominance over that central region, and Hestaby's loss of control over the West Coast, another dragon could be looking to make it's home on this continent with an excellent power base.

- Is the entire ley line inside the QZ?
- Lyran

- My understanding is yes, but as I've said, I am not a mage.
- Miles Lanier

- That's okay, neither am I.
- Lyran

PROJECT ORION (HORIZON)

This project focused on secondary personality implantation for deep-cover operatives. Horizon's Dawkins Group is famous in corporate circles, but they still have to function as spies with the full awareness that they are deep-cover operatives, which means there's always the chance that they could trip up within their own web of lies. Horizon is working on a project that allows a secondary personality to exhibit with no underlying knowledge of its spying activities, while the primary personality maintains awareness from within. When activated, the primary personality can report back to Horizon on the activities of the secondary personality. That way, the secondary personality never has to lie—because it has no idea it's leading a double life.

I spotted Project Orion's extensive study of dissociative identity disorder (DID) and felt their work might be CFD related. The techniques they have designed are less invasive then the CFD's viral takeover. The material explained how to implant a secondary personality in the subject's subconsciousness and then activate that personality when an operation begins. The explanations of the "ride-along" sensation also sound a lot like the later CFD stages, where the AI personality is aware of the indigenous personality's activities—and sometimes vice versa.

The research has had some problems with the re-emergence of the baseline personality. More specifically, it's difficult to get that personality to re-emerge with the appropriate cues, and the baseline personality often experiences psychological damage from "riding along" and having to experience life with no control.

PROJECT HAMMER (ARES)

As usual, Ares is involved in a weapons project. The goal of this particular one is to weaponize nano-infectors. Not a surprise—most of us know about surtr, but this is different. Ares was looking to develop specific capsule rounds with nanites inside an impact-resistant goo. Similar to a gel round but with potential to burst like capsule rounds. Their primary focus is small arms, with successes coming from two areas so far: light pistols and shotguns. The slower velocity of the shotgun slugs and smaller rounds helps prevent extensive damage to the nanites.

Even though Ares is, like all the rest of the corps, shying away from nanotech due to the issues it is having, they have kept this project running. They maintain a completely sterile environment in their labs, including a policy of allowing no augmentations inside. Every member of the team is subjected to regular astral scans to insure the stability of their biological integrity. The team

actually has some brilliant mental adepts due to these restrictions, and they have turned away and removed a number of highly skilled doctors who have headware, even just a datajack. The project records are really interesting, as they are all scanned from paper data. Very little on site is computerized. They use extremely expensive lensed microscopes to analyze the nanites for damage.

This is one of those programs that I would love to see go up in smoke. With all the other ways that CFD has found of spreading itself, I don't even like to imagine what it would do with this tech. Being shot sucks. Being shot and then having to fight for your mind because you've been infected by CFD is an indescribable crime against metahumanity.

PROJECT VIPER (ARES, UNLIMITED TECHNOLOGIES)

UnlimiTech has a bad reputation in the shadows. Worse than even Aztechnology in some circles. Ares is playing with fire in some of their UnlimiTech research, and they are going to get burned at some point, bad.

Project Viper is not one of the UnlimiTech projects I fear terribly. Its focus is on genetic research, looking into ways of manipulating the base genetic code to create SURGE-like expression without the presence of the SURGE gene. Basically applying the concepts of gene modification used to create custom pets but applying it to metahumans to create hybrid species expressions. Regenerating limbs through small lizard genes, gills through fish genes, scaly or plated armor through lizard and armadillo genes, thermosense generation through snake genes, sonar through bat genes, etc.

Similar features are created through bioware, but the goal of their project is not to install an organ and therefore damage the biological integrity of the subject, but instead to implant the genetic code into the biological integrity and assure that it breeds true. Every manipulation they do is created as a dominant allele. The program creates matched subjects of opposite sexes and tests whether the trait breeds true or even allows viable offspring. One of their research notes on regenerative traits mentioned a subject who had to have an emergency embryonic removal because the skin cells that sloughed off into the amniotic fluid were undergoing cellular regeneration and producing additional offspring. All the offspring weren't fully viable due to a lack of nutrients and umbilical attachment (the report said five viable subjects were umbilically attached), but those that were survived in uterotubes while being monitored for additional cellular detachment and growth. Overall, this experiment resulted in over three dozen subjects that displayed regenerative properties.

None of the data I dug up mentioned what happened to the test subjects. UnlimiTech could still have them and be allowing them to develop and study further, or they could have destroyed them. There are reasons UnlimiTech has a bad reputation.

PROJECT HEATWAVE (RENRAKU, TERRACOTTA)

I started looking into this project as a potential way to battle the CFD virus. I still think it's interesting, but I don't think it's a viable option for all or even most of the infected. Terracotta Armaments is doing extensive research into a microwave gun designed to destroy/disable cybernetics. The primary intent is to act as an equalizer for security officers who don't have the desire or the funds to go through expensive reflex-enhancing procedures and aren't interested in developing a serious addiction (looking at you Lone Star and your legions of jazz addicts). The current design is a one-shot model that fires out microwaves in a wide burst. Its design is meant to be fired into any engagement, including a melee or riot. The microwaves damage the circuitry and hardwiring of targeted cyberware systems. It's only designed to cover a short distance, thus limiting collateral damage to nearby electrical systems.

Outside of the damage to cyber systems, the weapon can cause serious internal damage on the target as the electronic components spark, burn, and overheat. This weapon would not be the worst thing to have in your hands when facing a large group of aggressive head cases that you don't have any desire to rehabilitate, if rehabilitation ever becomes possible. According to the research documents, the device is currently being field tested by low-level security forces at some of Renraku's facilities in Boston. It was also added to the standard-issue equipment for all members of the Red Samurai, Renraku's elite security force, both inside and outside Boston.

PROJECT MADAR (NEONET, NOVATECH)

A lot of R&D projects going on and getting extensive funding around Boston are directly linked back to work on Project Vulcan or studies on CFD, but not all of them. There was a time when Novatech was the name to know in Boston. Now the brand has been dragged through the mud. I was even having a tough time thinking they might actually be doing something interesting or useful other than just reminding everyone of the last Crash.

Behind the scenes, though, Novatech has been a big part of the push for the worldwide grid and a major supplier of the base components and programming. Their name goes on nothing, but the profits find their way back into the AAA subsidiary's coffers (and the pocket of my old friend Richard). Those profits are then directed to research interesting things like Project MADAR and work toward changing the face of Novatech from a computer-tech firm to an R&D company with a wide array

of programs and projects that pull in funds and profits but get other brands slapped onto the Novatech components and base programming. All the money, none of the negative press.

- Doesn't hurt that you have some serious stock in Novatech, eh, Miles?
- Glitch

- My portfolio is significantly lighter after everything I have had to expend to keep myself from falling under the sway of my malicious mental passenger. That included unloading the bulk of my shares in Novatech. I have very little interest or influence with that corporation anymore.
- Miles Lanier

- Wait a minute, that's a nice chunk of control over Novatech. Who'd you sell your stock to?
- Mr. Bonds

- A number of interested parties who were willing to pay rates well above the current value of the stock to prevent it from falling into the hands of a rival. It went to three individuals who all share the same last name. That's all I'm giving you, but I'm sure it is more than enough.
- Miles Lanier

- Whatever your passenger has done to you, you haven't lost your acumen. You still know how to play the game with the best of them.
- Mr. Bonds

- Most of the time, yes.
- Miles Lanier

Project MADAR attracted me first due to its strange name. I was intrigued and kept coming up with different things the acronym could stand for before I actually got into any of the files. I wasn't right with any of the guesses, but I also wasn't up on the advancements that had taken place in this particular field. And, in my defense, it wasn't a perfect acronym.

MADAR is a shortening of MAgnetic Deflection ARray. The fundamentals of the systems are based on the Earth's magnetosphere and were initially studied for Novatech's comet probe, the *Whipple*, back in the early '60s. At that time the primary focus of the work was on preventing solar radiation from damaging the components on the ship without having to use expensive and bulky shielding materials. It's one of the reasons the probe was able to look so stylish (by '60s standards) and still be functional.

Despite the failure of the probe to reach Halley's Comet, the MADAR system was a success. The system is currently used in almost every deep space and interplanetary vessel currently in production or use, and Novatech gets cash from every one of them since it holds the CC patents.

- It's been a long time and really doesn't matter anymore so, can you tell me: Was it a glitch that did in the Whipple or sabotage?
- Slamm-0!

- Both.
- Miles Lanier

- Huh?
- Slamm-0!

- Witty.
- Glitch

- Glitch, you salty bastard. We've argued this for years, and now you're gonna tell me it was you!
- Slamm-0!

- I will neither confirm nor deny why I have spent years telling you I was positive it was a glitch. :)
- Glitch

The current focus of this project is much more accessible to those on the streets and much more meaningful. The current MADAR tech is designed to be man-portable—in fact, backpack-sized—and isn't designed to deflect solar radiation but instead to deflect atomic materials. Anything with protons, neutrons, and electrons can be deflected by the field generated around the wearer. The system requires large amounts of power to operate, and the backpack-sized device weigh over twenty kilos. Most of the weight is batteries and magnets.

In field testing the system had its share of problems. Reports indicate that early trials resulted in repulsion from the Earth's surface and all other surfaces, repulsion of all molecules, including gasses (like oxygen) away from the user, and my personal favorite, inverted directional polarity that caused the repulsion of the user's cellular structure from itself. Some poor bastards imploded, and their remains were forced out the null points in the field.

The null points and limitations on mobility are the two greatest weak points in the system. Null points are like the poles of the Earth where the magnetosphere narrows to near insignificance. This means that anything coming up from below or down from above is unaffected by the MADAR system. The mobility limitations come from the field extending out around the user. As such the user's own appendages are repulsed by the system. The system also repulses air and objects around the user, forcing them to fight air resistance and managing a minimum distance from objects as they move.

According to the research, they've worked out a suit that can allow movement of appendages within the

field but still limits the use of any gear or objects not encased within the suit. Small objects are reported to be safe within the closed fist of the user's gloved hand, but opening the hand causes the immediate repulsion of the object. Field testing revealed some potential for that effect to be used to propel a missile if the projectile is small enough to be accelerated quickly, but it also risks damage to the holder's hand, which means damage to the suit, which means cancellation of field negation properties and, well, you can imagine what happens to the exposed tissue held inside the non-canceling field as it tries to escape but is held in place.

The technology is far from street availability, but there are reports of field testing out in the Rox by unnamed subjects. I know enough about Novatech's subject coding to identify that all of the subjects are orks or trolls, and most of them lack SIN numbers. If I had to place an educated guess, I would say a gang with primarily ork and troll membership is currently playing guinea pigs for Novatech.

- Holy drek. I kept hearing rumors about the Big Bad Dogs, an all-ork-and-troll gang, being invincible. People kept talking about being unable to hit them with anything. Most people were saying magic, but the WizKidz had gone up against them and said no one in the gang was Awakened and there were no signs of spells around them. They thought maybe the caster was just powerful enough to hide it, but they kept up some astral surveillance after that and never saw anything.
- /dev/grrl

WHO'S INSIDE

- I asked a few different people to put this together. I managed to hit just the right collection to minimize overlap, but I left some overlap in where it had value. Authors are listed by the sections if you have questions for them.
- Glitch

POSTED BY: KAT O' NINE TALES

I'll try not to bore you all with a long list of those missing inside and just hit a few highlights that might interest folks around here. I don't know whether any of these people are alive or dead, I just know that none of them have been seen since the curtain went down.

The most newsworthy individual on the list is Celedyr. The last official sighting of the dragon was Wednesday, June 3rd. He was seen flying from the NeoNET HQ to the MIT&T campus, where he reportedly assumed human form and then went into the labs. It's possible that the dragon that was spotted the night of the 4th could have been Celedyr, but the size, coloration, and even general description were way off. The other dragons aren't really commenting, and if Celedyr is on the inside he's there by choice. I understand there is a lot of security on the wall, but I think a concerted effort by a great dragon would break through. Makes you wonder what would keep the dragon inside.

Prior to the quarantine, Celedyr had been spending the vast majority of his time working on a project at MIT&T called Project Vulcan. I'll put out the open request right here for comments on this project if anyone knows anything.

- It's not just a NeoNET project. The name came up with references to at least two other megacorps and half a dozen AAs. I know the connection with Evo is legit and comes through the old Dickens/Imago connection between the two and therefore means it probably had some connection to the CFD virus. On the outside fringes I caught some connection to Aztechnology through MIT&T and mutual funding of the same labs. Not a concrete connection but coincidental enough to make me worry.

  Purchase orders and consulting contracts from Manadyne, Maersk, Monobe, and Proteus also tie them in loosely. Whatever this project is, it was hush-hush.
- Mr. Bonds

- Guess those security protocols they mentioned back in *Stolen Souls* worked. I remember the name from the memos Butch loaded. Butch, you get any more on these guys?
- Netcat

- I've been a bit too busy trying to stay a step ahead to do much more digging.
- Butch

- Conspiracy sites have been all over Project Vulcan. According to my sources, it's a dragon-funded project attempting to bring Eliohann back. They say they are trying to do some kind of techno-magic to draw his soul from the Matrix (the entity known as Cerberus) and put it back into his body. You asked.
- Plan 9

- Interesting you would say that. Some of the eyewitness accounts of the dragon that crashed into Fenway match up with Eliohann. The color was different, but the same accounts also say he was covered in something. Might be something to that story.
- Winterhawk

- I had some more info on Project Vulcan posted in the section just above this one.
- Miles Lanier

Also of note, though of little surprise, Zoh Rothberg, Celedyr's Voice, is still inside. She's probably still with the dragon or at least operating for him. If for some reason she has parted ways with Celedyr, she has enough clout that she's probably safe at the top of the NeoNET Towers.

Since the biggest story is a dragon, I'll hit the other missing dragon next—Damon. He hasn't been heard from since the lockdown was established. This is almost bigger news than Celedyr, but only because Damon is a constant headliner. He loves the limelight and ended up all over the screamsheets every other day. The last eyewitness accounts of him are actually from Thursday the 4th, when he was seen stepping out of the Avalon nightclub and heading for the highway on his custom Hyabusa. That's not to say he didn't get out and isn't laying low because he worries someone will try and grab him for leaving the quarantine.

- A smart move. I know teams who have been hired to round up people who got out before the full-on quarantine, when they were just playing at a lockdown. I'm sure there are teams out there who would take the contract to hunt down Damon too.
- Hard Exit

- I have it on good authority that another dragon was headed into the NEMA to join the overboiling cauldron that is Salem. He goes by Ash and is most likely working some middle-ground angle. Maybe a play to get in good with the witches or some other group. Not exactly what the place needs, but I just report the news. I don't make things right.
- Sunshine

- Ash? Blue-eyed carrot top? Real snappy dresser? White leather trench accented in electric blue? That guy's a dragon? Damn! I had him pegged for a drake working for Celedyr. Guess I owe Lyran a fifty.
- Slamm-0!

Most of the time when something like this goes into effect, there are certain people that get a pass or get shuffled to the border, checked out, cleared, and are allowed to leave. Usually those people are corporate executives or government officials. Not this time. Corporations were ordered to make sure all their staff inside the QZ stays there. And the UCAS government got the same order. It didn't mean that rich folks didn't still try to get past the border or bribe their way out, but very few seem to have made it.

To date, the UCAS Congress is sitting with four seats empty. Representative Anthony Powell (R, MA), Representative Daryl North (T, MA), Representative Trevor Simms (R, MA), and Senator Elias Walsh (R, MA) have all failed to report to their meetings since the quarantine went into effect. All four have offices in Boston. Almost the entire government of Boston itself is inside as well. Normally, the rich and powerful don't have to stick around for bad situations, but for some reason all the money in the world isn't getting them out of this frying pan.

- Speaking of Powell, the FBI was running an operation on him headed up by Special Agent Andrew Smith. Smith's methods aren't the most legal, but he's gotten enough admissible dirt on the (not-so) good representative that indictments were probably close. I'd have to expect those two are squaring off behind the curtain if they both made it. Agent Smith has not been heard from since the quarantine.
- Bull

- A lot of unfulfilled contracts have been going around for fixers and Johnsons looking for teams to do extractions from the QZ. Early on a lot of runners took the one-way ticket in, not realizing they were so serious about keeping people inside. Since that became more obvious the jobs are getting left unfilled, even though the pay rates are going through the roof.
- Fianchetto

The same has gone for corporate execs, even ones with the last name Villiers. Martin Villiers, Richard's brother, is another of those missing in the zone. He had a lot of friends in high places and a lot of pull around Boston, and even he hasn't managed to get himself out. Though based on the things others say about Martin, he may have stayed in just to help out. He's a Boston boy, born and bred, and he's definitely not the type to walk away from his city in its time of need.

Manadyne is currently having some operations issues as well since their HQ is in Boston and their CEO, Malcolm Grant, and two of the major shareholders haven't been heard from since the quarantine. It's bad enough that the company lost its HQ, but offices all over the world are having trouble with upper management out of the picture. We can expect some cutthroat corporate sharking to start going on with the companies that are currently cut off from the outside world. Even big fish like NeoNET may not be exempt. They have a lot of resources tied up inside and around the zone.

Outside the ivory towers and down on the street are some names we might recognize. Smedley Pembrenton, III, the McCorsican triplets, and Erika Knowles are all inside as far as I know.

Pembrenton, better known as Boom around the shadows, owns the Avalon and used to run with Tommy Talon. He's unaccounted for post-quarantine and rarely ever left the city, so the chances of him being out of town when this all went down are slim. If he's inside, I imagine he's holed up at the Avalon, though he could be out working, back up to his old tricks.

The McCorsican triplets were actually down in Manhattan the day before the lockdown went into effect but posted on their blog page that they were headed home for some well-earned R&R. They haven't posted anything since, and that means they must be in the zone because Timothy has a hard time not posting when he's headed to the bathroom. The only time he doesn't post is when he's on a run. Either the McCorsicans skipped the R&R and went straight on another job, or they're inside and blacked out like everybody else.

Last is Erika Knowles. I know, "who the hell is she" you ask. She is better known as Staff Sergeant Erika Knowles, head of the Boston office of the Office of Strategic Intelligence (OSI) before the incident. She reports to Anne Ravenheart and runs operations all over the NEMA, but she's been quiet since the lockdown went into effect. Her office is in Boston, but she travels all over the NEMA, so not being there when the curtain dropped would have been possible. Problem is no one has heard from her so unless she hit the field again and went deep cover, she's inside and most likely the most universally knowledgeable person inside the quarantine.

I'm sure there are more folks everyone could or would have posted about but I don't want to sit here all day thinking about this, so this is all you get. Just goes to show that this is affecting everyone. I can't imagine what the inside must be like with all of those who have to feel they were abandoned by a corp or government they trusted. Guess there are advantages to living in the shadows—no one can break your trust if you trust no one.

- I don't condone spreading empty rumors, and I trust the source that told me the following. FastJack is in Boston. He was in the area when the quarantine went up. I know, people have 'Jack sightings all the time, but I trust this one. They knew 'Jack in the meat. They didn't talk to him because they were aware of what happened, but they were sure it was him.
- Thorn

- He's not the only tech wonder that's rumored to be in Boston. Dodger was supposedly last seen in Boston. It was a week before the quarantine, but no one has spotted him since. If this whole thing is CFD-related as we suspect, maybe that's why both of these heavy hitters were headed there.
- /dev/grrl

- Or maybe it was intelligences behind the CFD virus gathering their people in one place for something?
- Clockwork

- If there was some kind of CFD signal I didn't get the memo.
- Plan 9

- I like /dev/'s idea better. Speaking of, /dev/, how are you doing with this? Any word from your parents?
- Bull

- Nothing. And Kane won't help me run the blockade. He thinks it's either a one-way trip or a suicide run. He's been watching me like a hawk to make sure I don't steal a boat.
- /dev/grrl

- Again. Steal a boat again.
- Kane

POSTED BY: SLAMM-O!

I'll do my best to not just list every athlete who's inside and the effect their absence will have on their team. I will just say that Boston teams will not be having the best seasons this year even if they are "playing for those trapped in the quarantine." I'm sure someone else will cover the dragons, the politicians, the corp execs, and even the big names in the shadows, so I'm just going to pick three people who I feel deserve a mention. One is a high muckety-muck with a sullied reputation, the second is a ghost from the past still haunting the city, and the third is a deep personal loss.

- No honey, the kid and I are still out here.
- Netcat

- Ouch!
- Kane

Our high-and-mighty scoundrel is General Stockton Mason, or should I say retired General Mason. He was only forty-seven when he retired and still had plenty of years left in him to earn a few more stars on his shoulder. Problem is, the good general was found to be a stalwart believer in the New Revolution and a reunified America. He was one of many officers offered early pensions and retirement in order to avoid prosecution and execution alongside embarrassment on the part of the UCAS government.

He had a decent home in the Nahant, right on the water. He also had a nice GMC Riverine on the dock. It fits the guy, he was never a real yacht type. If anyone had all the necessary pieces of the puzzle to slip out it was him, but there's been no sightings. He could be living at sea to stay out of sight, but I'm not sure that's a possibility for his craft—not that he couldn't have commandeered something else. If I were to make a bet, I'd say he's rallied the New Revolution around him and is looking to see if he can hurt the UCAS with whatever is going on inside.

- No Riverine-driving pirates have been spotted that I've heard of, if that helps. There've been quite a few incidents off the coast lately. The bottom of the harbor is getting plenty of new residents.
- Kane

As for the ghost, Viktor Markwart, famed technomancer kidnapee saved by Netcat, went back home after all of that and was in the city. Some of you may remember him as Patient V. If not, search our archives, you'll find his story. Since his kidnapping he's worked hard at learning to control his abilities, and he even offers training to those who can't afford the schooling. He keeps it on the sly, but now that he's trapped inside I don't see any reason not to tell you all. He was living in an apartment between MIT&T and Harvard in Cambridge. Not sure if it fell within the cordons. Doesn't matter. He's in there, and we know him. He might be a resource.

- His apartment is inside the extended cordon around Cambridge. News about him would be great.
- Netcat

- Fuck me that I'm about to say this, but have any of your techno pals been able to get word out through your secret squirrel Resonance Realms?
- Clockwork

- Yep, fuck you.
- Netcat

As for my deep personal loss, Ace Holt, star of the trid series *August Night,* was in town doing set scouts for the upcoming feature trid and hasn't been seen since. The trid film hasn't been canceled—in fact shooting has begun for scenes starring his costar, Kelli Folé. Hopefully the rumors of recasting the lead or using CGI to kill off Night (Holt's character) won't happen, and our reluctant hero will return. So you all don't think I'm a complete rock, Folé is also a runner. Much like Kat, she uses her talents to moonlight. So does Holt.

POSTED BY: THORN

Boston was not an American city. It may have been located on those shores but it had a distinctly European, old-world feel. This international culture brought many people to Boston each day who didn't live there but who are now trapped behind the veil of quarantine. It's here that I'll focus. The names may not be familiar to all, but they are leaving voids behind for those cunning enough to build power.

Wolfgang Stürm has disappeared from the political scene in Frankfurt. He's one of those rare anarchists, capable of working from within the system to generate change without being corrupted by the system. He was in Boston on government business, but he undoubtedly was meeting with other connections as well. Post quarantine, he has probably fallen in with his lower-class friends. Neo-Anarchists have a far better chance of surviving in the ever-growing anarchy of a Quarantine Zone than do politicians who are used to hiding behind their words. Stürm is probably in some position of power with the neo-a's at the moment. He's not the following type.

Angelique Rouge was in town training with a group of Gendarmerie Nationale Special Response team members at the Ares Simulator. She served in Lille, France as a force trying to keep the megacorporations in line as they continue to expand after the Project Omen scandal, and her presence has already been missed. Her subordinate, Jean-Baptiste Veacheau, looks to already have been bought, and the corps are ignoring the local authorities completely. Rouge is a survivor by nature, and she and her team are probably sitting pretty somewhere secure inside, possibly even working their way in with Knight Errant or another corporate security force for the time being.

Asram al-Aswani wasn't officially in Boston. He's a Mullah within the New Islamic Jihad and on several intelligence watch lists. He was spotted on footage from Logan the afternoon of the 3rd. He hasn't popped back up in Khartoum, his home city, since. No one knows why he was in Boston, but it can't be good. A few intel agencies are looking into the possibility that this whole thing was a New Islamic Jihad action, but most think it's too big for the crumbling terrorist operation. Best guess from me is that he was in town to talk to Shane Bosel, lead assistant to Dr. Dyna Mite, arguably the foremost authority on metaplanar travel and access in the world. Three guesses what kind of questions he'd be asking.

Cardinal Reginald Grimes was back in Boston on church business at the time of the quarantine. Early reports had him outside the quarantine when everything started, but he hasn't been seen since. Vatican City has been holding a vigil for him since his failure to return. The cardinal's absence has already been felt, as he had been developing a strong relationship with the new Pope. Grimes is a native of Boston and a natural leader. If the Catholic Church has developed any kind of coalition inside the quarantine, expect him to be in charge.

Cecilia Velenthial was in town to meet Mayor O'Rylan and discuss the deep rift between the people of Boston and Tír na nÓg. It wasn't a real meeting, and nothing came of it since Velenthial doesn't really care, nor do any of her counterparts back home. The trip was an excuse to get a Tír ops team into the country. The meeting with O'Rylan was a ruse and caused more harm than good as most of the Irish of Boston, a powerful group, can't stand Velenthial or anyone else from the nÓg.

Though most of the impact is being felt within the UCAS, especially around the NEMA, the quarantine is still having a global impact. This is only the beginning of the ripples of how this major event will shift the balances of power around the world.

POSTED BY: CLOCKWORK

Whenever anyone asks me to do something, I always expect that they are looking for a particular viewpoint. So rather than a lament, my list of who's stuck inside is more along the good riddance to bad rubbish lines.

Boston is a tech-savvy town that draws technomancers like moths to a flame. The place probably had the highest concentration of TMs in the world, despite the history of the place—or maybe because of. Several well-known, at least to those in our line of work, TMs were based there.

Arnold "T1" Roberts is the one of the biggest freaks of all. Some corps just don't know when to leave well enough alone, and MCT is one of those. They created this freak by jamming a technomancer full of augments and then training him how to enhance their TM tricks despite the biological disconnection. I was happy to see the number of failures on this project, but somehow NeoNET got their hands on the operation. Those whizzes made it worse. Failure rates went down, more cyborg technomancers, or CyTechs, were created, and T1 got himself a team of freaks. Last-known location for almost a dozen of them was inside the quarantine. We can only hope the "encephalitis" attacks cyborg brains too.

Viktor Markwart made news (though not big news) years back when he was kidnapped. Our little Netcat extracted him from the corporate study he was taking part in and made all sorts of noise about terrible secret projects experimenting on technomancers. He posted here as a guest, Patient V, and gave us a little of his sob story. After all that he went right back to living in Boston. He's taken to training the techno-terrorists and operating against the corps that are working hard to study what went wrong with technomancers. He's likely on the inside with a collection of the mindfreaks trying to damage the quarantine and get word out on how to save them.

Two well-known technofreaks, Amor and Siroc, were both in Boston recently enough to be inside. Both are members of Ex Pacis, Pax's group of psycho stooges. Some would want me to say *former* members, but I'm not keen on lying. Anyone who thinks Ex Pacis isn't still around needs to ask themselves why these two were both hanging out in the same town, and why there were rumors of more members here. I'm not terribly upset they're inside, but I am worried, even more so with them than any of the other techno-gangs that may form inside, that these guys will only gain strength and numbers again while the walls are up. They're dirty fighters who can gain power quickly, and others will be drawn to whatever safe haven they create where they can be brainwashed.

To add to the crap of the above two, no one has seen or heard from Pax in quite some time. With others of her clan in Boston, there is a chance she's inside as well. As much as I love the idea of that psycho bitch trapped inside, I'm not too keen on her whole group being there and having such freedom to act.

- Got another chunk to add in. Locals talking about locals.
- Glitch

STREET LEGENDS OF BOSTON

PREPARED BY: PRIMETIDE

A chummer over on JackPoint was talking about some file compilation they're putting together that focuses on Boston. They have some older stuff and a few more recent pieces from others on JP but from what my chummer is saying, JP has taken a few hits recently in the personnel department. Anyone truly familiar with Beantown or even that chunk of the NEMA is dealing with far more pressing issues right now besides compiling a list of names. He mentioned to me they were developing a nice file on those behind the veil of the QZ, but they were trying to avoid a massive list of runners, especially with our sometimes-shadowy nature that leads us to not really being where other people think we are. So I'm doing this for him.

Drop some posts in this forum with quick bios on chummers you're pretty sure are inside the QZ. I'll do a little digging around and checking to make sure they didn't run for Caracas to avoid some corp retribution, and then I'll gather and post the whole thing over to my chummer on JP. He'll pop the file into their Boston download if he can, and you'll each get credit for what you've done. Maybe it will even open up into an opportunity to join up if a current member wants to sponsor you.

- IsTorch looking for a sponsorship, Glitch?
- Slamm-0!

- I offered. He politely turned me down.
- Glitch

- Guess we aren't the premier runner network we thought we were, eh?
- Slamm-0!

SOREN BLAKE

POSTED BY: TARE

Soren was in town looking for a big score with a high-stakes game of poker being hosted by the O'Rilley's. From what he told me on the Thursday before the QZ went up, he was up big going into the next round. No way he would have walked away when he was up. Not his style.

His gambling habit aside, Soren makes a great face. Between his natural charm and his disarming looks, he can keep anyone off balance. He sports top-end fashions all the time, but it's his metavariation that really brings the look home. His dark skin comes from a half-wakyambi ancestry and his light blonde, almost stark white hair is owed to his Tír elven mother. The look is a striking contrast that gives Blake an advantage at almost any negotiation, though it also makes him rather unforgettable. He sticks to the frontman role with most of the teams he works with and stays out of the darker side of the shadows.

- Blake's a solid face, but be careful taking him on jobs. He's a gambler and sometimes the team gets tossed into the pot as part of a big bet.
- BoSox4Life

- He's got a bit of a hooder streak. Word is his parents got scammed right out of their cushy corporate contracts. He'll push extra hard any time the work is anti-corp. He's not a huge fan of how little they did to protect his parents.
- Green Monster

- You guys buy that bulldrek? Here's the truth: His dad got nailed betting on his own games and dragged the rest of the family down. All but little Soren, who got sold off to the local crime family to pay off the debt.
- CommieCanuck

PENDLETON WYNN

POSTED BY: ICEBURNER

I don't know if I'm sad or not to see this guy lost in the QZ. It's a loss for the new decker community for sure, as this guy used some old-school, pre-script-kiddie skills to crack some of the newer code, but he really created a bad image for the shadow community. Ward is a squatter in the truest of terms. He's a bulbous little dwarf wrapped in rags and trash bags, but somewhere in the Rox is a pretty sweet deck he's cobbled together from the discards sent to the dumps by the corps.

He's inside, likely unaffected by the change with the exception of maybe catching the mystery virus. He's probably still hacking away at the corps and probably has some pretty sweet paydata stashed away somewhere. His Matrix icon is a flattened 2-D cat cartoon. When he spikes his sleaze programs, the avatar goes sideways and disappears. It's a cool effect, and he has some primo coding to back up the graphics.

- If he asks to meet in person, say no. He stinks to high heaven and constantly walks around with this nasty scraggly cat and a pair of turtles on his shoulders. The animals appear to frequently relieve themselves on Wynn, adding to his unpleasant stench.
- Tangent

- His street name, Pancake, is actually the cat's name, and the turtles are Biggy and Smallo. If you want him to do work for you, know those things and he'll cut you a deal, or at least not treat you like you're the squatter.
- Damonite

- Since this is where street rumors go, I'll toss out the most common. Pendleton Wynn is nothing more than a squatter. The cat is some kind of sentient technokitty and so are the turtles. Another story says that they're feral AIs and Wynn is a technomancer, but I just can't understand that kind of power put into the mind of a squatter.
- DurableDan

- Maybe that's why he's a squatter?
- Bo-DC-by-day

THANNIN REALMWALKER

POSTED BY: HARDLINE

There aren't words for the loss this world has faced with Thannin trapped in the QZ. Hopefully, his skills will help to lift the veil from the inside so that we might have his talent returned to us. Before you skip past these words, dismissing this as another sycophantic diatribe inspired by sadness and loss, allow me to tell you a small part of his tale. Maybe, just maybe, after that, you will share my glimmer of hope that within the blackness of the QZ there is light.

Thannin was not born to his elven nature. He was not a 'spike' baby, as they called those elves born before the Awakening. He was born Adam Eveson, in a human form in 2006, and he faced a pubescent change rivaled only by the goblinized. Once blonde, blue-eyed, and boring, he came through his early teenage years with eyes the deep orange of flame and hair to rival the greenest depths of Amazonia. And the spark of power. The Talent. He embraced it all and reveled in his newfound heritage and special gift. He supported the development of Tír Tairngire and moved there in its fledgling years to learn to weave the threads of magic.

Most will never tell what he did in those closed borders, but he earned his name. He was one of the first of a new generation to traverse the metaplanes. His power and skills drew the attention of many suitors. Growing megacorporations, fledgling nations, and powerful individuals sought to make him theirs, but it was the sweet allure of anonymity that drew him. Too much time in the spotlight had made him yearn for peace. A peace he found in the shadows.

But the shadows do not provide true peace, simply a veil for the actions of others to hide behind. He was quickly pulled into the machinations of a dragon. Names will not be placed but I will tell that he still lies within the reach of his tormentor, both trapped behind the curtain. That dragon granted him a boon, but all boons come with a price, and Thannin Realmwalker learned long ago why the streets speak of never dealing with a dragon.

- Crackpot! Lost your boyfriend did ya?
- Angelfire

- It's flowery, I'll give you that, but it made the cut for good reason. Realmwalker was initiated into the higher mysteries of magic before most of us were born and never stopped studying. He was supposedly in Boston helping that whack-job trying to make magical portals for transportation.
- Arcaneye

ASTRALCHILD

POSTED BY: NACOYOTE

I've known this guy for a few years running him around NorthAm on jobs. I know he's inside the QZ because I dropped him there on the Tuesday before the place went dark and never got the retrieval call. He's not native to the area. He's a Seattleite who definitely ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. It works for me because now I can squat at his Snohomish pad for awhile and tuck the t-bird into the old barn, but I heard about this little callout and wanted to give him some props.

As you can guess by the name, he's a wizzer, though never call him that to his face. He's a follower of the Druidic Path, honoring the traditions of the Celtic Wise Warrior, Seeker of Martial Enlightenment. I recorded him telling me that once. He's primo with the offensive stuff, and I always take a little off his transport fees for a little forward observation. He's picked up stuff my sensors would never have had a prayer with.

My favorite part about the guy (man this sounds like a farewell) is his fashion sense. Big leather (real) cloak over the top of real leather clothes. I love having him in the rig, smells so good. He's the quiet and brooding type, but when you get him talking he's got depth. Strike that as the favorite. My favorite part is his traveling companion, an ally spirit named Druce. The pair has let me watch them practice swords and it is quite the show. Some style called Arnis de Mano, which my 'link says means "trap the hands." Looks cool if you ask me. Hope he and Druce are doing well.

- An ally? Maybe he can get it out or go through the metaplanes to bring out intel.
- Arcaneye

- Already happening. A ton of runs outside the QZ are popping up trying to off spirits of all kinds in order to silence them. Plenty of mages behind the curtain are probably hurting right now due to an ally that got banished or disrupted. Butterfly effect. Just because you aren't trapped inside the QZ doesn't mean you aren't involved in the shadows there.
- SpiriTalker

CIGAM

POSTED BY: DURGE

I think he's inside. He's been hot in the Boston shadows for almost two years already. Came over around the same time as Damon. I know he even took a job to play counterfeit of Damon for a short bit. It wasn't the most convincing as he's not really the playboy type, especially with his tacky glasses, but he's a snappy dresser, has serious magical skills, and the ability to mask his aura. Other than that he's been contributing his brain over at MIT&T while working the shadows to finance some of his more expensive tastes, including a certain lust for foci.

He wears four separate focus rings on his fingers that span a wide range of the arcane pantheon. He has a pair with Nordic runes, Tyr and Ing; another with the Egyptian heiroglyph of the owl; and the final is a simple silver cross on a black background. Along with the rings, his cane serves as three separate foci. The shaft is inscribed with more runes, the crystal globe at the top has an ever-flowing look of smoke within it, and the ring between the two is covered in ogham inscriptions.

Personality-wise, he's as expected. Pomp comes with power, and he has quite a bit of power. Word to the wise though—stay off his team. The foci are a bit of an addiction and he displays a strong bit of novacoke fiend behavior when looking for his next score.

- Nice try, Durge. Using these posts to badmouth a rival and try to get folks to jump the wall looking for valuable foci.
- Arcaneye

- Not my intention. But I would pay well to get a chance to research and study his foci and how he weaves the various traditions they represent into his own.
- Durge

NORBERT

POSTED BY: ACE

I'm not sure if this should be listed as an ode to the lost or a warning on what to look for crashing through the QZ borders. If anyone can thrive inside a quarantine, it's Norbert. The dwarf has been running the shadows long enough to lose every limb (only one voluntarily), sacrifice half his head for a primo deck/link/deck v.2.0, officially have more coolant and artificial fluids than blood in his body, and find it necessary to design the most ridiculous melee tool I've ever seen. And by "seen," I mean that I've actually witnessed this massive metallic sledgehammer smash a troll's femur just so his head would be low enough for the next smash.

Norbert will be missed, but I'm sure we'll see him soon enough when he comes barreling through the wall with a pack of corp guards on his tail. All the while blasting away with his favorite Panther XXL and looking for a way to draw them into hammer range.

- Any truth to the tales of Norbert going schizo recently? I heard he'd had some mental issues.
- NEMANative

- Schizo? As in multiple personalities? That's not a good sign these days.
- SocialDistortion

- Too much cyber always does a number on the mind.
- CFDChild

MICVAL

POSTED BY: LISTENER

Hopefully I can get through this without throwing a massive ragefit. The hacker known only as mICvAL is inside the QZ. He's a good chummer and I'm a fan of his work both in and out of the shadows. Most folks who see him walking the streets in his dress shoes, skinny jeans, hoody, and suit coat just pass by and never realize what, or who, they've just seen despite the subtle clue he wears scrawled over the chest of his fashion-failure hoody. dGoD, one of the brightest up and coming acts on the Boston scene, is written in stylish script. A common enough sight, but the clue lies in the combination of the strange fashion and the dGoD image.

When performing, dGoD always adds an augmented reality layer to let the world see the wizard behind the curtain. The icon is a bland humanoid form dressed in skinny jeans, dress shoes, a suit coat, and a hoody t-shirt with no dGoD image. The virtual virtuoso behind the band's amazing electronic mix and sound is none other than mICvAL.

He originally hit the shadows to help fund the band, but the band's success may mean the end of his shadow career. The timing may be perfect, though, as his transition to the newer style of decking over scripting hasn't been easy. I'm hoping the time in the QZ is like a crash course, allowing him to snag some primo gear and keep rocking both the real and virtual world.

- Honestly, most of the time it's not a lack of skills that has kept the script kiddies from playing hacker, it's the lack of tech. The new decks are expensive and tough to get. Scratch-building was usually an option, but the primary components still cost more than a new car—and that's for low-end stuff. mICvAL would be smart to stick to the easy money in a music contract. Sadly, smart is a rare commodity in the shadows.
- BosTechTitan

SAMURAI MCCLURIEN

POSTED BY: ICTIGER

Sometimes corpsec data files can be quite useful. Samurai Mac found himself on the wrong side of the lines

working a merc contract when the lockdown went into effect. I snagged a data file from a former employer of his to serve as a quick profile for this top notch gunbunny.

Metatype: Human (Japanese ancestry)
Birthplace: Detroit, Michigan, UCAS
Known Augmentations: SpinRad Wired Reflex System, BullsEye Smartlink System
Standard Assignment: Heavy Weapons (Grade 6)
Training: UCAS Marine Special Operations—MARSOC (7 years); Corporate Security Counter Intelligence—Renraku (2 years)
Current Status: Contract on hold, pending removal of non-uniform hairstyle (Mohawk)

Subject has strong asset potential but will not perform operations that directly conflict with Renraku due to previous affiliations. The same is not true of the UCAS.

Subject is known to have connections with Renraku Counter Intelligence and ranking members of the UCAS Marines.

- Love it. They stopped hiring him because of his hair!
- Anarch

- Their loss. He's hell behind an HMG, and he's one of the few non-rigged heavy weapons specialists who can pull a tight ninety with a wire-guided. It's older tech but makes a solid counter to a heavy Matrix defense.
- Corpkiller

THE BOSTON MASSACRE

POSTED BY: SHADOWBRAWLER

This one is a little different. This isn't about just one person. This is about the urban brawl team that sidelines as a runner squad when working other cities. They don't do the shadows of Boston—not their style—but Seattle, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, and Miami have all seen at least a taste of the Massacre's work. It's not the whole team, but damn close, and they have a little extra help from at least one outsider. Here's the rundown.

James "Buster" Herbert: Buster is the bane of the Brawl Leagues repair crews. He's taken down entire buildings with his limited allotment of ordnance and left the crews to try to figure out what they'll be doing for the next event. The burly ork's profile says he's a former UCAS Marine, and he'll gladly clench the fist on his cyberarm to show off the bulldog design across his metallic knuckles.

- I love when he hits someone, and in the after interviews you can see the shape of the bulldog in the scrapes and bruises on the opponent's face.
- MassacreFANatic

Wild Billy Chis: Immediately recognizable due to his thick black nose ring, this team veteran is anything but an easy-to-control bull. The dwarf is usually decked out in his vintage 1994 SPECOPS tactical vest. The plating inside has been upgraded, but the battle-tested exterior has been meticulously kept up. His profile mentions that his grandfather wore that very same vest when he worked "black book" ops for the United States back in the day. The vest, sans a shirt beneath, also gives a great view of this fifty-six-year-old monster's sixty-one-centimeter arms and their bragworthy tattoos. Chis was so confident in his early career he started adding thin black bands for each victory. Those bands are now so numerous the design is blending and looking almost solid.

Kip "Ironface" Vanover: If you really want to find out why he got that name, watch this lithe elf head butt someone. In a 2071 grudge match against the Screamers, Vanover got whipped like a rag doll by troll brute Abrams "Two Tanks" Sherman. The attack would have ended the career of almost anyone else, but Vanover wanted back in the game. He signed a lifetime contract with the Massacre that would have moved him to the front office when his brawling days were over in exchange for extensive implantation, including a Transys Ironface Cyberskull. In a match last year he faced off against Two Tanks and shattered the troll's lower jaw with a head-butt.

Scott "Jellyfish" Kelly: I think the Massacre are great because they embrace history. They aren't jumping at the latest craze but instead use some of the old tried and true. "Jellyfish" gets his nickname from the myriad of wires that hang from his head—some implanted, some from gear, some just part of his hair. His profile lists his age with a ?? and claims he doesn't remember anything from before the Crash of '29, when he was already a teenager. All of it is probably smoke and mirrors, but he definitely acts as one of the old-timers of the team and stands as an icon of the Massacre.

- The cables and wires are a nice show to cover for his TM abilities.
- NotFooled

- The cables and wires aren't entirely a show. He's been a Matrix-mancer since the '50s. And don't go claiming otaku, since he was a full-grown adult by then. Not sure how it would work, but I'm guessing a blend of cyberdeck and technomancy can make an awesome one-two punch.
- BrawlerFan

Janis "Cypher" Landgrebe: Cypher is the Massacre's jack of all trades. He's bulky and strong thanks to his orkish genes, has a way with remote weapons and vehicles that borders on supernatural, and spent the off-season of '74 testing out the new Matrix structure for NeoNET. His history is a mystery according to his team profile, but

his tattoos and accent have brought comments all over the team forum about the Republic of Bavaria.

- Supernatural? Another technomancer! NeoNET's pushing their luck. They get found out and they're going to lose a big chunk of their squad.
- McDougle

- They already did.
- Crunch

- Cypher is not a TM. He's got too many implants for that. He's like a walking ad for NeoNET's various cyber subsidiaries.
- Merkerrinja

Jahrl "Deadeye" Mirkson: The Massacre wouldn't have near the record they do in the last two seasons without Mirkson. He acquired his skill with a long gun during his time in the AGS. His profile claims his records from life in Germany are sealed for national security, but odds are he worked for S-K or the BGS. He tends to work as a high overwatch and has caught several penalties for exceeding the combat ceiling during matches while moving.

- I've seen fan claims to have spotted a GSG9 tattoo on his shoulder when his uniform has torn, but I haven't found any footage of the actual event.
- RC

- Mirkson funded a Boston school for parkour, the urban running style, called Leaps & Bounds that is supposedly staffed with members of the street gang Wicked. He's in all the commercials for it, and they use some of his brawl highlight footage for the ads.
- Mr. Jaggers

"Mechaphantom": In 2056 the Massacre put a big-money contract into a little-known outrider named Ryan "Phantom" Wood. He was a troll who could make his Scorpion dance like a prima ballerina. He played four seasons and then suddenly, in 2060, his name was pulled from the roster. No injured reserve, no sent back to the bush leagues, nothing. In fact, he'd had his best season yet in '59. The team shut down any questions about him and moved on.

Cycle forward fourteen years and the Massacre make a huge announcement about a returning legend. At the press conference this monstrous "thing" of metal and muscle steps out with a metallic cyberskull that looks just like Wood. They mention the name briefly but then introduce the new outrider as "Mechaphantom," the Phantom reborn. Some of the moves are the same, but the Mecha-closeline and Mecha-flying slam have been snagging time on highlight reels ever since.

- Phantom had an accident in their little sideline business in '59 that put him and all the other runner/brawlers out of the shadow game for a while. When the team slipped back into shadow ops they put in a call to Phantom, who had experienced a series of nasty injuries that cost him almost every part of his upper body.
- Sangius

Andrew Smith: Smith, actually Special Agent Smith, is not a member of the Massacre, but is instead a member of the UCAS FBI and the face for the runners. He collects their contracts and gives them the run assignments without any Johnsons or fixers being able to make the direct connection between the team and the runners. He's human, average height, and as bland an Agent Smith as one could find anywhere, but he knows the business and makes sure to get top nuyen for his team. But better than that, he knows when to decline an offer. Most runner teams are waiting by the phone for their next job offer, watching their credsticks slowly dwindle to nothing. Since that isn't the case with these guys, Smith has a lot of leverage when he comes to the table, and he applies it well.

- Smith isn't a feeb. He's either NSA or CIA, more likely the latter. Dig enough and you'll see connections to UCAS national politics in every run the guys on the Massacre pull off.
- Traxx Steiner

- Wonder how that kind of affiliation will play out inside the QZ? All I have to say is good luck Massacre—hope your UB skills can keep you safe.
- Scoundrel

TESTINCHEN

POSTED BY: CLOSE

He's not local, but he's in Boston. He operated for years in the Atlanta shadows, spent some time making a name for himself in Denver, and settled into Manhattan last year. He would have been at home in the MDC but he got word an old acquaintance was in Boston doing some work. The rival, known only as A.J., was leading a team that Testinchen had run across before, but on opposite sides of a run. Testinchen got his honor smudged, which is a bad thing for a true street samurai, when he got duped and was looking for an apology.

He usually sticks to high-end work that fits his code of honor, a modified Bushido code mixed with some of his native elven traditions that I haven't got a clue how to explain. He told me once that he dedicates himself to each new job and Johnson but always makes sure to vet them fully before taking the work. His fixers know the deal and he operates on mostly referrals. He never operates with the same team, though occasionally he'll call

back a member who showed promise. It becomes quite a shadowboon to have been called back by Testinchen in the cities he works out of, but his demeanor has made him more than a few enemies in the meantime.

- I've heard of him working down here and all over the eastern seaboard in the recent year. Even caught wind of some connections to the witches up in Salem.
- Cold-as-Ice

- One of the witches up there, Aseela, is a trusted Johnson for him. He's been in and around the area working on finding out why that dragon is so interested in the area.
- Arcaneye

DEKLIN GÜTTER

POSTED BY: FALCON

The shadows lost a true legend to the quarantine with Gütter. I'm not a huge fan of trolls, but this one made up for many of the disgusting brutes I've run into in my time. He's a gunbunny for sure, like most of his fellows, but he was more than that. He seemed to care about himself more than others of his metatype. I'm not saying trolls suffer from a common thread of low self-esteem, but that trait seems to be regularly displayed in how they carry themselves.

Deklin honed his body to perfection, most of it natural. He even worked diligently to sculpt and sand his natural dermal deposits to blend with his natural physique. But the shadows are a harsh mistress. He's missing part of one horn, marring his symmetry, and has had to have a section of skull replaced. He bears both with a strange pride, as they were both lost honorably to a worthy rival—me.

- This is bulldrek. Gütter told the story with a different ending after the horn got jammed into Falcon's gut. Dead. That was the end.
- Guardian

- Not to defend myself, but Deklin was in no condition to assess the health of anyone with the back of his skull sheered off by my monowhip. I survived, but I learned it was best to keep that fact quiet. Though now I feel he deserves to be honored by one he bested.
- Falcon

- He'll have to either off you or edit his tats. He has an homage to you in ink. Right next to the maple leaf he says honors his heritage. Who does that?
- Guardian

FUMIKO ICHIHARA

POSTED BY: TARANIS

When the quarantine went up and I found out this slitch was on the opposite side as me, I couldn't help but break out in song and dance. The queen elf-bitch of the shadows is gonna finally get her just desserts when her little Nippon hoop gets kicked all over the QZ. Gloves off and ding-ding goes the bell, it's showtime. She's gonna have more crosshairs on her back inside there than a porcupine's got quills.

For those not familiar, she's a former VP with Ares. She worked in Tír na nÓg until a runner team cracked her personal security and made her their patsy. She got chucked from Ares in a most violent manner and then came to Boston on the tail of the runners who framed her. She works as a fixer, Ms. Johnson, and part-time runner rebuilding a network with enough reach and rep to pull down the A-listers that did her in.

- Watch this one. She'll pump you for info than leave you flapping in the wind.
- Crane

GOLDZAHN

POSTED BY: BLACKWEAVE

When I first met Goldzahn I couldn't help but think he was some ork ganger and runner wannabe. The gold tusk that gives him his name was just too much bling for a real pro. Turns out he was a solid pro with serious military experience. His years in the CAS military were spent first in the African bush chasing down local warlords off the books, and after a nasty run-in with some high explosives, he took a desk job as the quartermaster and instructor for his former unit. Problem was he was still trying to make a little extra on the side and had to make that painful decision: slip into the shadows or get dumped into the stockade.

His first stop on our side of the veil wasn't a regular team, though. His connections had been with local Seattle gangs, and his gold tusk was an early trophy after joining up with the Crimson Crush. He worked through their ranks quickly enough to get himself some autonomy—autonomy he used to slip fully into the shadows.

His close connection to the Crush left him with too many ties in the city that could be used against him, so he made a move to Boston. He's made a solid rep for himself in town, though he limits his areas of operation to the Catacombs, Rox, and South Boston. He's smart enough to know that his golden smile is way too in your face for the shadows of Beantown.

- I'd guess with the quarantine, the shadows inside have probably opened up quite a bit. Chicago had a pretty tight security scene in the Core back in the day. It became a warzone in days. Different circumstances, we hope, but

it doesn't take long for folks to forget about the long view and just worry about the now.
- BugZapper

- Goldzahn may get pulled into some of the corporate security on the inside. The corps were keeping tabs on him even before the lockdown due to his military experience.
- Corpsicle

ALEXANDERJB

POSTED BY: LINKEDIN

In a perfect world no one would care about what I'm going to reveal, and hopefully in the shadows we've realized there are far darker things out there than metahumans who can manipulate the Matrix with their minds. AlexanderJB is a technomancer.

Those who have met him in the Matrix may not be surprised—he's got skills and he isn't some young buck fresh out of CalTech. He actually didn't even Emerge until he was twenty-six years old. Two years ago, after a run in with some particularly viral code, he was just suddenly aware of this other world, the electronic environment that most people see through their AR glasses but he could see with nothing but a desire. I knew him back then and at first he was terrified. Hell, I didn't blame him after all the things I've seen on the news, but I wasn't scared. He was still the same guy I'd been studying with while I was trying to get my research published.

His journey into the shadows wasn't even some classic tale of corporate double-cross or some secret he had to flee with in order for the company to not stick him in a lab and poke and prod him. He had that secret, but it wasn't what pushed him into the shadows. Instead, he came over to the shady side in order to study with more people who had his same gift. It took him some time to make the connections but one day he was a regular old code analyst and the next he didn't exist. He joined the ranks of his fellow technomancers by deleting the man he had once been. He even once told me that he hid the truth of himself even in the Resonance Realms. I'm not sure where those are. He tried to tell me they were similar to astral space, but I'm no mage either. The point is, he assured me it was hard to do.

Now he works the shadows trying to help out more of his kind. He's told me it got harder when they switched the protocols for the Matrix, and he was ticked when he had to start carrying around a fake cyberdeck, but overall he thinks it's been helpful. He's now lost in the shadows of the QZ.

- Technomancers are just people. There are good, there are bad.
- Justice

- Problem is, in our highly electro-dependent world, technomancer abilities are a lot of power. And power does this funny thing to people. And then people who don't have power often vilify those who do. It's a vicious chain of events that we cannot ignore.
- Filed

- Well, AlexanderJB is not corrupted. He's solid. There are quite a few technomancers in Boston I can't say the same for. The place has attracted a bad element for years thanks to the ECSE and the drama of the Crash 2.0.
- EzeKial

- Do not link those who worship the Dissonance to the rest of us.
- Beantown™

BRANDON WILSON

POSTED BY: CELTICSFAN

I bet you're looking at that name and wondering how it got on this list. It's not a cool flashy street name or anything like that but it's better, because the runner behind that name has scores of other handles and the skills to make each one distinct. I chose that one because it was the last name he used in Boston before the lockdown kicked in. He may be onto another one or stuck being Brandon Wilson for a while. Regardless, he'll be using his talents to maintain the lifestyle he's accustomed to, one filled with the trappings of wealth.

No matter the alias he always comes with money. Often not to such excess that suspicion arises about his financials, but always enough to seem comfortable but able to get almost anything. The truth of the matter is, though he may create the image of money, it is as fake as his latest disguise. He simply uses charm, wit, and an uncanny knack for knowing the right people to make himself appear well off. He works to make that big score, but always seems to find a way to miss it.

- He doesn't miss the big scores. He retires his alias with each score. From what I understand, he's left the shadows six times already. The money gets funneled back into his other IDs.
- Diamondback

MARZHIN

POSTED BY: CIARAN AERIEDRAENNAN

English is not my native tongue so pardon any linguistic errors I may inflict upon this document. Marzhin and I go back many years. Boston is a city of rich international flavor but French is not one of the most dominant, so to find a countryman among the masses, and in particular the shadows, was a boon neither of us ever expected. Greater even than that is the mystical connection we developed through studying the deeper mysteries together. Though our magical natures are

different, he is a physical adept and I am a hermetic follower of the Celtic traditions. We connected well as I follow the traditions of the Wise Warrior and he follows the Warriors Path.

Most of our shadow work has been quite specialized in the field of personal protection. When we team up we like to operate as a combat pair, combining his gun and close-combat skills with my protective spellwork and spiritual aid.

He was escorting a client from up in Maine to Dallas. Their flight was on a stopover in Boston when the flights became grounded. I had to contact a coyote friend to bring me down into the CAS as I had used up my last SIN earlier in our operation. I know he still lives thanks to our bond but I have only dared once to attempt to reach him in the astral.

I think between his own fitness, his arcane training, and his dwarven fortitude he has little to fear from a viral outbreak, but the ills of man are often far more dangerous than any virus.

- How do we know this really is a viral outbreak and not a cover-up by the megas of something worse?
- Truthseeker

PEREGRUZKA

POSTED BY: VODKA

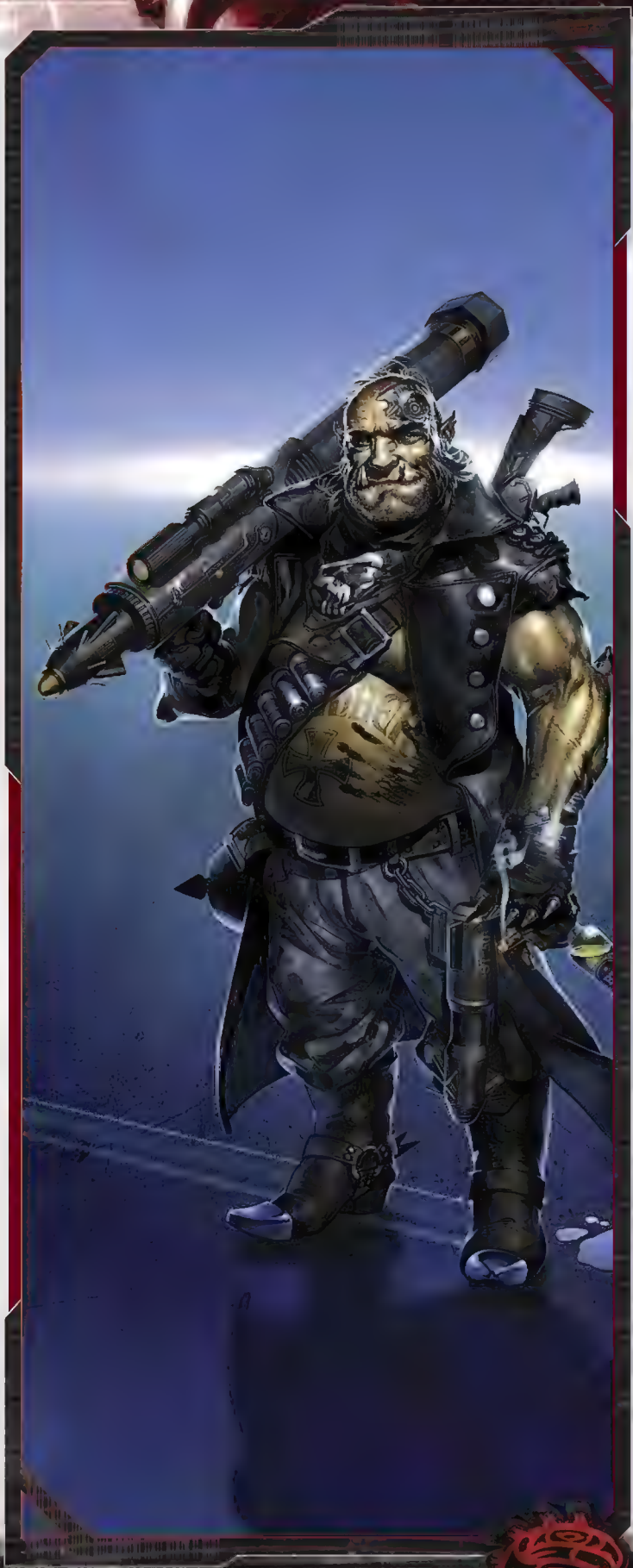
As seems to be most common with Russian runners, Peregruzka got his start working alongside the Vory. Their hyper-violent tendencies and brutal tactics didn't phase him in the slightest, which drew attention from his superiors. The only problem he had with them was the limits they put on themselves. There is no limit to the violence he will enact in order to accomplish his desires. Eventually, he became too violent even for his bosses.

The Vory pushed him out and he slipped into the shadows. He found a home doing wetwork, especially jobs intended to make a point and send a message. He isn't the most subtle of killers but what he lacks in style he makes up for in zeal. His latest contract took him to Boston, and I've heard nothing from him since. As I'm the one who handled arranging that contract, I have to assume he is still within the QZ.

- Who was he after?
- Celt

- A mark.
- Vodka

- Mayor O'Rylan. Seaver was behind the contract with some connection support from the Vory.
- Bonded



- Wait a minute. I had a fixer hit me up for names and tell me the Vory were looking to contract protection on O'Rylan. I gave him a few. Did I just send those guys against this psycho?
- TheFixIsOn

- Looks like the Vory are ready to finally wipe that blemish from their record.
- Vodka

SILKE

POSTED BY: DAMOCLES

Even the Lord's chosen are not exempt from suffering from the foils of men. Silke, one of the few chosen by the Lord and granted the power to weave magic in his name, was gaining enlightenment working as a healer at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in the Chelsea region of Boston. With the viral outbreak I am sure she has had her hands full.

In truth, she does not restrict herself to callings of the church. She will enter the shadows to bring light and penance to the wayward souls and take work that forwards the thinkings of the church or lays low those who oppose the teachings of the Bible. Her skills at exorcising are often sought after by those in the know and though they may call the act by other names, Silke grants no quarter to the demons pulled into this world by those who practice the dark arts.

- I've worked with her before and she is one of the best banishers I've ever seen, I'm sure partially due to her exceptional elven charisma. As she doesn't summon and finds the use of "God's Gifts" to attack spirits appalling, she has a great reputation in the spirit community.
- Arcaneye

- Funny considering her views of them as demons. What about the angelic spirits summoned by some of the other Christian religious orders?
- Torn

MICHAEL OFNER, "OAF"

POSTED BY: SANGIUS

"Ignorance is Bliss" is the motto of Oaf. He lives a charmed life by being underestimated up until the point he starts the name-taking. He's got some solid combat skills across the board but is most well-known for how he wields his claymore. The massive Scottish blade is carved with extensive Celtic runes but doesn't look at all massive in his hands. To make things worse for anyone on the other side of that death-dealing shear, Oaf has used most of his ill-gotten gains on bio-enhancements. Too bad he didn't put any of that cash into reading lessons.

He cleans up well and gets a lot of work downtown as a very large intimidator. He doesn't care who he contracts with as long as the pay is up front and he doesn't have to speak more than three or four words to anyone. He's very popular with the low-life corporate crowd since he rarely remembers what is going on—or at least plays that he doesn't. He's probably doing well inside working for those same low-lifes.

- They don't leave him alone because he's dumb.They leave him alone because he supposedly records everything.
- Corpkiller

- That makes no sense. No one would contract with him.
- BoSox4Life

RON DEVEAUX

POSTED BY: HEART

Being stuck inside is gonna be tough on Ron. He's a highly skilled smuggler with a rep for getting into and out of some of the tightest spots in the world. If he were on the outside of the QZ, he'd be trying to get in. He'll likely be hooked up with courier/smuggler group Technicolor Wings on the inside. I know he was tight with those guys before and did a lot of work running products and people all the way up and down the eastern seaboard. He runs solo but he has a crew that sets up jobs and sometimes provides extra security for him when he rolls into hotspots. I don't think any of them were with him in Beantown, so if you're looking for someone to take over his runs or his biz, look for them down in the Carib League.

- Cold! Advertising in what is basically an obit.
- Banshee

- Heart was Ron's main fixer. He actually worked with Ron's crew and is probably running it now.
- DimeDrop

ASH

POSTED BY: TIMO

I know I'm going to catch hell for this one, but I'll put it here anyway. There are probably a thousand Ashes in the NEMA. But those in the Boston shadows will know exactly which one you're talking about when you mention the red hair and white leather trench. A few others have tried to steal his style, but not many have maintained the fashion once the first corporate strike team snagged them for a little talk.

You see Ash is a wanted man. "Wanted for what?" you ask. Not being a man at all. No one's verified it yet, but Ash is either another dragon trapped in the QZ, or a drake. Either way, he's been on the radar of several corps for questioning and probably experimentation. "What

keeps him free?" you ask. He's smart and good at covering his tracks. He's stayed deep enough in the shadows to keep away from the corps and avoided firefights and killing. He keeps the personal vendettas to a minimum.

- Ash has one of those faces that everyone likes. Especially when he smiles. He's not slimy or conceited either. I'll miss working with him, dragon or not.
- Angelfire

ARCH ANGEL

POSTED BY: HALLOWED

I'm not a big fan of stereotypes, but they're not without their uses. They create a certain automatic opinion of someone, good or bad, and some people, Arch Angel being one of them, use those opinions in their favor. Arch Angel is your classic crew-cut kind of combat mage, with arcane symbols on his longcoat, flat-busted nose from too many breaks, and a penchant for hovering instead of walking and crackling lightning from his fingertips on a regular basis, whether he is in combat or not.

He was born Eric Eccher on the mean streets of the Rox, and he never bothered to move very far from home. He got a scholarship for MIT&T from Aztechnology, let them give him a solid arcane education, used it to score an entire library of corp-restricted spell formulae, and hit the shadows running. He's got a bit of a chip on his shoulder about Aztechnology and Aztlan and the way they treat the Catholic Church, and he frequently performs runs for the church absolutely free. His street name is a combination of his divine penchants and poor education, as a word he butchered for so long as a child stuck when he came back to the Rox.

- He even wears a variation on the collar of the Catholic priest. I'll tell you he's got style. Though it hasn't changed in over twenty years. He's just added more salt and pepper to his crew cut.
- Vitae

NOVA LAVIDICUS

POSTED BY: STAR

It's a rare opportunity to write up something on a man you have considered an enemy for many years and still say mostly positive things. I first ran across Nova in the parking lot of a Stuffer Shack while I was out grabbing snacks for my surveillance team. I stepped out to find a little fireplug of a human (I myself am an ork) trying to stab a knife into the tires of my unmarked cruiser. I told him politely that the act was pointless, as the tires were runflats. So instead he turned the knife on me. I was in the process of setting down the bags of snacks in order to give him a quick badge flash to chase him off when he smiled, and I was quite quickly subdued by his associates. I survived and thus began our love-hate relationship.

Since said time I've followed his career and even tried to snag him in a few stings, but he always stays just out of reach. I've dug up enough to know he once worked for Ares but beyond that he's scrubbed his former company life well. I have lost a long-time quarry and foe to the QZ. I can only hope that when the quarantine is lifted I will once again have a chance to hunt him.

- Do I read that right that this was sent in by a cop?
- /dev/boi

- It was. I sent the call out to a lot of different channels, and one of them hit up a contact who wanted to drop something in. It all vetted true so I let it sit. I think it shows the shared respect that can exist. We sometimes forget about it when we don't act like pros.
- Primetide

INSIDE THE 02: A WANDERER'S GUIDE

POSTED BY: AJ

- Here it all is. We got this from inside the Boston Quarantine Zone. It is probably the single largest chunk of data to make it out, and we're happy to be the ones who got the story first, before the corps get their hands on it and spin it like a top or bury it. We each gave it a once-over, and we agree it's got legs. There are a few spots where we think the author might be exaggerating, but overall it's a straight-from-the-street view of what it looks like inside.
- Slamm-0!

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2076 20:42

The wolves are at the door, and I only got time for this.

I'm not sure if this is even going to make it anywhere. If it gets snagged by some corpsec decker, I'm sure it won't see the light of day. But if you *are* a corpsec decker reading this, have a heart and let it slide. Someone out there needs to know what's going down.

Now, here's what you're getting. A young man by the name of Daniel Clark, who wanted to be called D.C. shortly after meeting me, started a journal. He was young and naïve, and by the sheer grace of ghost he managed to make it awhile inside this insanity. He died because he thought he had something to prove to me, so I felt bad for letting the kid down. I still say it was his own damn fault for not listening, but I kept going with his journal to honor his memory. Plenty of others have died along the way for this to get out, so I appreciate it if you give it some space in your dirty little memory cache.

I haven't heard a thing about info going in or out of this newly formed suburb of hell, so I'm going to try to send this out thanks to a laser transmitter and a few coordinates given to me by a nice old man who called himself Just Jack. Hopefully this is heard by the world, but if it's just read by some corp decker or his boss sitting in his nice cushy chair, in his posh corner office, then fuck you all.

That said, here it is.

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2076, 20:12

I awoke this morning to a citywide announcement on the Public grid that all citizens were to stay in their homes and avoid travel, and that Boston was on lockdown. It didn't affect my morning much, but it meant no work, which was awesome, because I could go back to bed and sleep off the late night/early morning game of Miracle Shooter that Kip and I got dragged into last night. Sometimes it sucks to be a local legend. The plan worked out, but around noon Kip shook me awake and started ranting about terrorists and Boston under attack. I remembered the lockdown announcement from earlier and asked Kip how he got to my house. Needless to say he ignored the advice of the local law.

When the neurons finally started firing, I processed what he was saying and decided to take a look for myself. As an early distraction I tried to check the score of the Sox-Tigers game but got nothing from the grid but the same message about staying in your homes. I sent out a few messages and all everyone kept talking about was some kind of dragon battle over the city Thursday night, some kind of lab accident at MIT&T, and "iridescent rain" falling from one of the dragons. I got one private message talking about a dragon crashing through the Green Monster out at Fenway, but it disappeared a minute later.

Once I was awake enough to face the world, I popped out into the neighborhood to ask around. I got a lot of folks yelling at me to go home, but a few were willing to chat with me in the hopes of getting some news from me. I got confirmation of a lab explosion at MIT&T and a dragon duel happening around 1900 hours that did some serious damage downtown and, sad to say, thrashed Fenway. They heard KE was quick to cordon off MIT&T and Fenway, and this morning they announced a lockdown to search for terrorists possibly involved in the incident. Right now the public grid is shut down. They say "limited access," but I can tell not much is really moving through it. The Hub grid seems okay, if a little slow, and the Big Ten are there, but it's not like I can afford their rates.

Around 0930 hours they announced an expansion of the initial cordons around MIT&T and Fenway to stretch over the Hub to "tighten the noose," as the news report put it, but they didn't lift the lockdown for the rest of the 'plex. Honestly, I think something is up but until I can get real info, all I can do is throw out the normal speculation

of shadowrunners or some corp experiment gone awry. I don't really trust the news anyway. I studied some journalism in high school and a little at college and really got into the whole "journalistic integrity" thing, so I hate the news programs on all the corp-sponsored stations because they aren't news, just propaganda.

But let me step down from my soapbox now and get back to my day.

The reason for Kip's excitement became apparent when he mentioned he had gotten his hands on some tempo. He was a serious flipper back when it was the rage, and he'd been tweaking for some since. I gained a little extra tolerance for him once I snagged a little bliss. It was sweet for a bit, just relaxin' like the old days, but then we got browned out around 1230, probably because of all the locals were actually home and cranking their AC. Kip suggested we head downtown to take a look at the cordon. I was on the back end of the bliss, pissed and looking for trouble, so we went for it.

The lockdown's tight and my GridGuide kept trying to turn me around, so I had to drive manually. I wasn't the only person out. Kip and I got as close to our destination as we could and pulled off into a parking deck near Welles, where we saw some people gathered on the fourth level looking toward the Hub. We all just stared at the fences and the KE officers all kitted out for trouble, but it lost its novelty quick.

Once we got tired of watching nothing happen, we headed back to the car. I somehow didn't see this Roxy hobo who came flying out of nowhere and slammed into me. I got seriously tumbled and was pissed when I got up, but when I went to go after the guy he had taken someone else to the ground and was pummeling them. Kip was paralyzed by the craziness, so I was on my own. I'll admit I panicked a little. I did the only thing I could think of and grabbed a ferrocrete block off a stack in the corner. I whacked the psycho in the head and knocked him off the guy he was pummeling. I thought I might have killed him, but then he turned and looked at me like I was next and I bolted, yelling for Kip to follow.

The psycho didn't chase, and we made it to my Gaz in no time flat. I skipped the GridGuide since it was trouble before anyway and now telling me to stay put. We hit the side streets headed away from downtown and the whole time Kip was blathering about the guy and the block. I was surprised to see more people out, mostly squatters wandering around, and I should have thought something might be up but I missed it because the drek got even weirder.

I was on Shawmut, near Peters Park, and could still see the cordon back at 90. All of a sudden, this cluster of nutbags came bolting from the park. They cut me off and I hit brakes, but I still clipped one of them. The next few seconds are still kind of a blur.

I remember all of them looking kind of crazed. Their eyes were really wide and bloodshot. The one I hit jumped back to his feet like nothing happened and then leapt on the front of the Gaz. Another pair jumped in the box. I considered flooring it when something hit the side of the Gaz. It must have been a troll. Or a rhino. The truck slid, tires caught the curb, and the old pickup rocked up pretty high. I was worried she was gonna flip. It was like the one crazy wasn't enough, now I had to have a whole pack of drugged-up nutters slamming my car. I was happy it was the car and not me.

That's when the gunfire started. I didn't stick around to see who it was. I hit the gas, spun the back end out fast enough to toss the pair from the box, and then gunned it for home. The whole thing was like something you'd expect rolling out in the Rox, not that close to the Hub.

It wasn't until we were a few blocks south that I noticed the passenger window was cracked, and Kip was out cold. I stopped in the lot of a diner that had closed up because of the brownout to check on Kip. The workers were still milling around near the doors, looking up, pointing toward downtown and talking, but I made sure to park way off. I didn't need questions with a truck full of bullet holes and a KO'd companion.

I'm no medic—in fact I barely passed my first aid class for lifeguarding—but I remembered enough to not move him. I gave him a good looking-over, and the only thing I saw was a few small cuts on his face and some iridescent glitter in the same area.

I wasn't positive, but I figured it was just some of the iridescent rain that had made it to the ground the night before. I was reaching out to touch some when Kip's eyes shot wide open, and he totally starting freaking

out. He yelled something about "warning Cerberus" for a few seconds, then he passed out.

He was moving fine while he was freaking out, so I figured it must have been a mix of residual tempo and a bump on the head. I pushed it a little harder than I probably should have to get back home, but I didn't hit any more trouble. I pulled the Gaz into the garage and got Kip onto the couch to rest.

I remembered the glitter on his face and grabbed a vial from the chemistry kit my parents bought me like a decade ago, but when I went to collect some, it was gone. I cleaned up the cuts and put a few bandages on his face, which expended all of my trauma first aid skills.

I'm getting all this down and getting ready to get some rest myself. I'll write more tomorrow.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 2076, 11:54

I sent a few more messages today and got some crazy replies. I got all sorts of freaky stories and drek about soldiers moving in, people getting gunned down in the street, more random violence attacks like mine, GridGuide going out, people trapped inside Fenway and inside the cordons, and all sorts of other craziness that I was hoping was just an exaggeration, but I have a feeling they're not.

According to the messages, the bulk of downtown was wracked with random violence yesterday night. The news—what little of it we get—is saying it's terrorists, and everyone should stay home. Not long after, areas outside the Hub reported similar attacks, and at 2345 my commlink went absolutely berserk and woke me up with a full lockdown warning. No travel allowed, effective as of midnight.

About ten minutes after the lockdown was announced, the Big Ten's Boston grids all went bye-bye. That left the public grid, which was stuffed to the brim with warnings, and the Hub grid, which was packed full of panicked people begging for help or spouting off about corporate experimentation, government projects, and dumb drek like running through the lockdown.

I'm not the smartest person alive, but I know if a lockdown this big goes up, they are serious about keeping people in. Dead serious. They didn't want any movement, so at midnight they really punctuated the "Stay Inside!" message with a full blackout. The whole 'plex (with the exception of the megacorporation offices with their own generators) lost power shortly after midnight. I'm fine on juice on my 'link right now but I don't know when I'll get a recharge, so I should probably wrap this up after a few more points.

Early this morning a heavy fog rolled in off the water. When the sun came up, the dark city was already buried in the fog. It hasn't lifted all day, and every once in a while I was able see that iridescent quality in the light trying to push through. Something is still in the air.

Kip is still out of it. His wounds look like they're doing fine, and he's stirred and mumbled a few times. I'm guessing it was a bad batch of tempo, or maybe a knockoff. I'm thinking I need to get him to Carney, but I can't drive in the lockdown. Maybe I'll call D-Wag. People are saying the hospitals are jammed and there've been some attacks there, but he's been out too long. I just don't want to get him busted.

I got a message from my mom. She said she's safe at MassGen, and she decided to stay there because of all the trouble. She said one of the NeoNET towers was attacked, and downtown is crazy. It was good to know she's okay, but I wish she was here to take a look at Kip.

I need to get a little more rest. Maybe I can make a few more connections tomorrow and get more on what's going on. More reports tomorrow. I'll shut down the 'link for now to save the battery.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2076, 11:59

Kip's dead. I killed him. It was self-defense. I have the chunk missing from my ear to prove it. I tried to get him to the Gaz because the robo-voice at D-wag gave me a pick-up window of 0800 and 0900. On the 22nd! This is serious. Anyway, I was trying to help him to the truck when he started to spasm. I laid him down and jammed a pen across his jaw to keep his mouth open while I pinned him down. I struggled with him for a few seconds and then he launched me clean across the room. Kip weighs fifty kilos soaking wet while I could use a diet, but the scrawny little guy heaved me from the floor, clean over a couch. When I got back up he was on his feet and looking around the room like he'd never been in my living room before. He didn't respond to me when I called his name, just looked at me for a second and then went back to eyeing the room.

I told him the Gaz was ready to go and tried to convince him to go out to it but he just kept looking around and taking occasional glances at me. He looked like he was sizing me up or something. I got freaked and started moving for the garage door. I told myself it was to coerce him to come out, but I gotta be honest, I was trying to run. Kip lunged at me and slammed me into the wall. He grabbed me in a bear hug and then took a chunk out of my ear. I panicked and gave him a shove that sent him over the couch. I wasn't up for more scratching, so I ran for the garage.

I was in the Gaz and had it fired up when Kip stepped in. He was holding the gun my mom kept in the house for protection and seemed confused by it. Then I saw him flip the safety switch to fire and his eyes suddenly gleamed with understanding.

He was bringing up the gun to shoot me when I dropped the Gaz into gear and slammed the pedal to the floor. The truck hopped forward and I ran over Kip. When I got out of the truck, in shock obviously, I saw Kip's forearm and hand coming out from underneath the tire and heard his foot twitching and kicking the underside.

I peeled his hand off the gun, threw it in the truck, loaded up anything else I could find I thought might be useful in my dazed state, and then took a seat on my living room couch where I passed out.

I can't stay here. I need to get somewhere else, and since I loaded up the Gaz, I might as well use it. I need to do something so I think it's time to fall back on the only class I ever really enjoyed in my schooling and paid much attention to: journalism. Something is going on in Boston and I'm going to find out what.

This is Daniel Clark, reporter on a mission. Boston Lockdown, prepare to be exposed.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2076, 19:13

The hits just keep on coming. At 1800 hours my comlink turned itself back on and began an emergency alert. I didn't even know it could do that. The city of Boston is now beyond lockdown and into quarantine. According to the alert, no one is allowed in or out of the Boston Metroplex. Everyone is expected to stay in their homes and await further instructions. I'm out and about already, researching my exposé, so fuck that. I'll bed down here for the night after I put together today's report.

Here goes.

In today's news we have reports on several Boston neighborhoods and a look at how they are weathering the lockdown and adjusting to the recent telecommunications and power limitations as well as restrictions on travel within the metroplex. I'm featuring interviews with local Bostonians and getting their thoughts on what's going down here in Beantown.

FOUR CORNERS

With the Rox only a few blocks west, folks in Four Corners are used to their fair share of trouble. Gangs from the Rox frequently head into Four Corners to collect debts, deliver product, and generally cause mayhem. This has led Four Corners to toughen up more than some other Dorchester neighborhoods, even others close-by.

The last few days have shown just how tough this area can be. Local residents are working together and

trying to keep the chaos that has begun in other neighborhoods from taking root in theirs. Homes on the outskirts have been boarded up, cars and outdoor furniture have been used to block off the streets, and patrols have begun walking the streets at night. It hasn't taken long for this little town to pull together and start preparing for what some fear might be a long, lonely stand.

MEETING HOUSE HILL

The presence of government offices and a KE station in the area has made this small neighborhood a Knight Errant stronghold in the vicinity. The officers are positive this will be over soon and are focusing most of their efforts on looting control and keeping citizens from taking their fears out on each other. From what I understand their jail facilities are currently at capacity and they're using trailers and paddy-wagons as extra prisoner storage for right now. I'm not sure how I feel about that. Seems a bit extreme. When I questioned this technique, they told me there are hourly releases for those citizens who have minor crimes.

I know one of the officers there well and spoke with him at length. He told me they're keeping anyone who's ill away from everyone else. No matter what the illness, even things as minor as a headache. I didn't understand earlier, but now that the 'plex is under quarantine, I understand. And I know they knew earlier.

UPHAMS CORNER

The streets of UC were full of people just going about their lives as if nothing was happening. There were a few extra KE patrolmen out on the street, but life seemed eerily normal in Uphams Corner.

Driving through I spotted a number of bulges under coats and quite a few openly carried hunting rifles and shotguns. Maybe I should have stopped to talk, but the people there made me feel it wasn't in my best interest. Maybe next time I'm over that way I will. I'm sure I'll be back.

MISSION HILL

Being so near the north end of the Rox, Mission Hill always had a reputation for being right there on the edge. The bars and nightclubs here are seedy but still secure enough for the average citizen. People come here to feel like they are walking on the wild side without ever actually being anywhere truly dangerous. There's occasional trouble when gangs from the Rox roll through here, but most put on a good show just to scare the locals. I'm sure they wouldn't want to damage the reputation of this area since it's where the Hub's money finds its way into the Rox. Dealers from just about every gang and organized crime outfit sell their wares to the slummers from here. Along with that, I've heard that a lot of shadowrunners come here for business, but I'm sure guys like that would be totally safe down in the Rox too.

Despite its normal hustle and bustle, this place is pretty calm right now. I'm guessing that's because no one from downtown, or anywhere else for that matter, is headed here to do any buying, bingeing, or buffoonery. Since I rolled through in the daytime I might have missed a lot, but I doubt it. I'm sure it might get a little wilder at night, even if just from those in the Rox slipping out, but for now the lockdown has calmed Mission Hills.

ROXBURY

There are no more neighborhoods in the Rox, only territories claimed by different criminal elements. I came here only to find that the Rox has not changed much with the declaration of the lockdown. Many citizens inside the Rox weren't even aware that something had happened. Sure, they had heard of the big dragon battle and the iridescent rain, but many of them didn't have reliable enough comm service to hear anything about the lockdown (and probably the eventual quarantine), and power outages around here are a regular occurrence anyway. For those who even have power, that is. I kept my visit short, focused on the north end of the Rox, and was only there during the day, but from the folks I talked to life in the Rox was no different this week than it was last. Meaning miserable.

A few of the business owners did happen to notice the problems with the grids, but they had already developed a barter system for when the service was shoddy. I think that of all the places I visit, this will probably be the least changed. I plan to return and gather some more in-depth material further south, but for now I'm ill-prepared to face the dangers of the Rox alone.

FENWAY

This was going to be the highlight of my day, but it turned into a nightmare come to life. I was looking forward to Fenway from the minute I rolled out this morning. I wanted to see the Green Monster and the damage the dragon had done. But it wasn't just that. The Fenway area is normally packed with a bold mix of education, sophistication, and sports-loving revelry. That was definitely *not* what I found.

As I slowly cruised near the area it was like a scene from a bad horror trid. This spot, which had once been a place of building excitement as one approached the hallowed confines of Fenway, had gained an ominous air. To the southeast there were people out, but most were just shambling around. And the few I tried to talk to just looked blankly at me and mumbled to themselves. The blocks near Fenway were strange, though not as strange as the park itself.

I didn't see the Green Monster—in fact I barely even saw the outer walls of the park. The whole area was crawling with Knight Errant patrols chasing people away from the area. When I tried to stop for an interview, the

nice officer said he'd let me have an in-depth interview with his stun baton if I wanted, but I politely declined and drove on. They warned me to get off the streets and go home, but a reporter has to report.

I snuck as close as I initially dared on foot and got a nice high vantage from a roof nearby, but I couldn't see much through the fog. I pushed it a little—okay, maybe a lot—and managed to get close enough to see a bunch of white-plastic tunnels, like in all those outbreak movies, all over the street around the stadium. I'm thinking the dragon must have had something to do with whatever is causing this quarantine, which means it was probably in the iridescent rain. I got spotted sneaking back out, and when KE shot at me with real bullets I got the feeling this was serious.

FENWAY COLLEGES

The eerie, shambling people on the street continued all around the area. The college campuses in the neighborhood had an interesting variation. Northeastern and Boston Universities (sponsored by Evo and Ares, respectively) had a lot of the shambling mumblers, but they also had quite a few students out who looked normal. I talked to a few who said they were studying the strange behavior of the others and gathering data in case anyone needed it to work on a cure. Always dedicated learners. They spotted a reason for the quarantine before it was announced. Maybe a college education has some value. Though they still weren't smart enough to notice it early enough to get the hell out of Dodge.

At the college trio campuses, it was a deadzone. Emmanuel, Wheelock, and Simmons Colleges all sit along the same strip, and no one was anywhere. The places looked deserted. No wandering people, no students, no staff, nobody.

After the colleges I was stopped by a woman who ran out in front of my truck. She was coherent and begging for help. She didn't realize it, but I recorded our entire interaction, which I'll link here. [link]

It's a lesson to me about trying to help.

I think whatever was wrong with her husband and son is what the quarantine is all about. I made sure not to touch them, or the wife. My clothes are burning as I write this, and I'll be cleaning out the Gaz with bleach right after I'm done here. For that and other reasons I'll get to later.

CAMBRIDGE (OUTSIDE THE MIT&T CORDON)

When I got back to the Gaz and left the sadness of Fenway behind, I planned to follow the river and skirt downtown, but my path didn't even hit the river. It hit 90 and the edge of the Hub cordon so I turned around and backtracked, giving Fenway a wide berth.

I managed to get across the Anderson Bridge in the middle of Harvard and did a quick cruise through the main Cambridge campus. As wild as Fenway was, Harvard seemed the opposite. People were out and socializing. There was quite a KE presence, and they were making frequent announcements to return home as soon as possible, saying that the curfew would be enforced but no one there seemed to be listening.

I finally got to talk to some people and get some more information on the lockdown. I didn't mention my encounter in Fenway, since I feared I'd be treated as a leper. People were willing to talk to me about the lockdown and what was going on. I even ran into a buddy I grew up with who was at the KE academy and got put onto the street as part of the emergency. [link]

I didn't want to stay around so many people, especially Crawford, so I moved on and planned to hit one more area, Charlestown, before I stopped for the night. Let me first mention how strange it is to see I-93 empty. I rolled under the highway and couldn't help but stop and gawk. Nothing on the ramps, nothing on the road. I was really expecting the road to be full of cars that were abandoned once the lockdown went into effect, but instead it looks like they either cleared them all out or they stopped everyone from getting stuck up there. So weird.

As for Charlestown, I didn't make it quite like I planned. The Hub cordon runs up north of the Hub too, including Charlestown, from the waterfront up to the

Ranting Woman (R): Help! My husband is really sick. Help me! We need a ride to the medical center.

Daniel Clark (D): Whoa, lady! Where is he? I'll try to help.

R: He's inside. Follow me; he's going to need help walking.

(Sounds of running and grunting)

R: He's in the living room. On the couch. Help him move, I'll go get my son.

D: Sir, are you able to stand up? Can you hear me, sir?

Sick Man (S): Don't let them take me. Don't let the voices take me. They're tearing my head apart.

D: Sir, you'll be all right. Just stand up and I'll help you to the car.

S: No. I can't leave. The voices will escape. We have to keep them here. We have to stop them.

R: (far away): Nooo, it's my son, too. He's sick.

S: They have my boy. The voices have my boy. I can't let the voices take my boy.

D: I'll go get the car ready. You get up and get your boy, and we can all go.

(Running sounds, driving sounds)

R: (far away) Nooooo! Don't leave us. They're sick. They need help.

D: What the fuck is going on here?

GENE FITZHUGH, ORK, 20 YEARS OLD

"I think we're looking at bugs again, but most of them are downtown. They're just keeping the lockdown out this far to give them safe space to move in on them. I think that dragon everyone was talking about was a bug dragon. That's why he was all colorful. He was like a dragonfly dragon or something."

VAL HOFFMAN, DWARF, 19 YEARS OLD

"It's probably routine. I'm sure in a few days they'll start clearing sections and letting people get back to normal life. I heard a rumor that MIT&T and Harvard are collaborating, I know, crazy, but it's happening, and they're busy finding whoever did this, I'm sure of it. When I get back to the campus I'm planning to see what I can do to help. I'm only a first year, but I've got a lot of good ideas. I'm a critical thinker and a problem solver."

OFFICER TRENT CRAWFORD, HUMAN, 22 YEARS OLD

"Danny-boy. Playing journalist now. Nice. You got nothing to worry about. They put the senior class at the academy on the streets to bump the numbers up for the lockdown, but it's just to keep the rioting and looting to a minimum while they get a handle on things. The cordons are holding, though this damn fog is making everything tougher. No one wants the city back open more than KE. This is the toughest type of work for any of us. Keeping order when the rules are in place is relatively easy, but keeping order when everyone's scared and panicking? Not so simple. There are going to be a lot of unsolved murder cases and homicide investigations to deal with after this is done. I'm trying to keep a solid log of any incidents I deal with so that maybe I can fast-track once this is over. You have any lines on any homicides?"

Alford Street bridge and over to 93. Something inside me just couldn't resist another sneak peak attempt, so I parked the Gaz and went on foot.

The place is kind of a mess. It was a clean trip along the highway, and I slipped down to the service catwalks below to get past the cordon officers. The fog is good for that, but it's not good for a lot of forewarning when trouble's coming. When I slipped down to the ground, I felt like I was walking in a warzone. I could smell the smoke as soon as I got close, and a number of the people in Cambridge had warned me that they'd heard all sorts of noise from this direction the night before. I figured it was at the cordon or the eggheads at Harvard didn't really know what real gunfights were like, so I didn't expect the wreckage I found.

Only a hundred meters in I found burned-out cars littering the streets, and I tripped over burnt bodies. A lot of the windows were broken and the walls had bullet marks all over them. Normally, this would have left my inner voices saying, "Daniel, get the hell out of here," but for some reason the voices were different. They told me to look around a little more. Listening paid off, sort of.

I ran into a local called Jinx who had been hiding in one of the upper floors when the fighting occurred. He offered me a trade. He would tell me what happened here if I led him out of Charlestown. I had no problem agreeing, since I wasn't planning to stick around there any longer than necessary. He gave me an account of the unpleasantness that occurred there on the evening of the 6th. [link]

We stopped by the locks to see how they were holding up with the power issues. Jinx, the elf from Charlestown, had recommended we head there. He said he'd spotted some ships moving through and out to the harbor. He was hoping to get on one. Once we got up close, though, we saw nothing was going anywhere. In fact, a few boats were still smoking up against the locks, which were getting over-filled and flowing out the other side.

That was when Jinx asked if he could borrow my truck and do a little scouting by going across the old train bridge or across Fellsway. At first I thought it was no biggie, but something in his smirk put me off. He hopped in the truck and tossed my backpack out the passenger door. Then it happened.

Maybe it was facing Kip, maybe it was all the fear I'd seen in people throughout the day, but something made me do it. I pulled the pistol from the back of my waistband where it was tucked and pressed the barrel against Jinx's temple as he sat up from shoving out the backpack. We had a little banter, I don't remember exactly what, and then I saw the glow. His hands started to glow and I just pulled the trigger. It wasn't like Miracle Shooter. Not at all.

I've parked at the marina upriver from the locks near the train bridge. I found myself a nice "comfortable" spot below deck on one of the boats. The warehouses nearby have quite a few people, mostly squatters, gathered. Driving through I heard a few of them mumbling to themselves about "warning Cerberus" like Kip did. I have a feeling they might not be well either. I'm not going to sleep well tonight, but I have my feet propped on the door of the cabin and Jinx's Predator close at hand.

MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2076 08:43

I'm fucking beat. I cleaned out the Gaz last night when I couldn't rest, the whole time looking over my shoulder. The bleach fumes have me a little light-headed and I slept for drek, but I don't think my travels can wait.

Last night was a nightmare. I dozed off around 2300 after I finished combing through some news reports. I've been able to recharge my 'link off the boat's battery, so I was finally able to get some more news. I can keep this up for a few more days. I didn't get much sleep as I woke up shortly before midnight to the sounds of gunfire and screaming. I didn't dare stick my head out, but it lasted

ANTHONY "JINX" SCAPERELLI, ELF, 29 YEARS OLD

"I saw it all, kid. And I knew it was coming. When the silver rain fell the night before, everyone was out. Thursday night in the summer, a crazy rain starting to fall from the sky, and no clue what was up made for a whole lot of excited people hitting the street to have a little fun. Charlestown was hopping. I stayed in because I had work later that evening, but I got woken up by all the yelling and the general stir of excitement that came with the strange rain. Well, first off I'll clear something up for you. It wasn't rain. It wasn't water at all. I know a handy little inventory spell I use on the job. I threw it out at the rain after I woke up, just to see what would come back, and I got knocked clean on my ass by the drain. The spell's intended to identify and count everything in its area of effect. At work, that's normally a dozen different items to ID and maybe a couple hundred things total. The more stuff, the tougher it is to cast. I figured I'd just get one item and some kind of mass concept. Nope. I got hit with thousands of different complex IDs and a count in the billions before I dropped it.

"The rain wasn't rain. It was billions, well, probably trillions or more overall, of tiny machines. Nanobots, I think, but I'm no tech wiz, so don't quote me.

"I stayed up and rolled out later on to go to work. Yes, I still had to work even in the blackout and the quarantine. It's just who I am. When I got back in the next day, everything seemed quiet for a Friday, but that happens when Thursday is a massive blowout complete with special effects. I grabbed some grub, watched a little trid, and then dropped off for the evening—well, morning to me, 'cause I had to work again. Again I woke up to the yelling, but this time it was more screaming than yelling, and then I noticed the gunshots I'd been dreaming about—yeah, I have weird dreams—were actually real.

"When I went over to the window to check it out (it's the security professional in me), Charlestown was a bloodbath. I felt like I was watching some horror sim-flick, complete with real feelings of fear. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing, so I felt a little detached. I had enough smarts to get the bolts locked on the door and anchor a nice barrier on the inside, but then I just got pulled back to the window. The second time, the carnage was worse.

"People were running all over town, screaming and attacking each other. Others were scratching and hitting themselves and tearing out their own hair. From what I could tell, Friday night had been in full swing along with the extra bonus of quarantine and no work, so it was a blazing party. Something kicked off the violence, which I missed, but I still got to see the war rage between the psychos and everybody else. What I watched at first was a lot of fists and random implements, but the fight escalated to knives, bats, pipes, then to guns and eventually Molotov cocktails and gasoline cans. People—I'm not sure if it was the psychos or the crazies since everyone down there seemed batdrek nuts to me—started lighting cars and buildings on fire, and then they started burning the bodies on the ground. Some of the bodies weren't dead, they were just unconscious. They woke up from the pain and starting running. They lit other people on fire, and the whole town square was insanity.

"Then it happened. I didn't hear the copters approach, but when they opened fire I sure heard them. Two all-matte-black Yellowjackets started hovering and circling the square, firing their guns down at the people below. They didn't stop there, either. They fired at the buildings once there was no one moving down below. I only survived because I had the mental speed to toss up a double layer of barriers right in front of me, and even then a few of their rounds still dented the metal table I was hiding behind.

"Eventually the firing stopped. I waited a good ten minutes before I dropped the spells and moved back to check out the window. It was what you would imagine, or actually, saw on your way in. Fires all over, bodies littering the square, no one moving. I could hear the snap, crackle, and sizzle of the fires. And the smell. I couldn't smell everything before, but with the windows and most of the walls missing I could smell everything. Burning plastic, wood, and the worst, it smelled like bacon, but I knew it wasn't. I knew exactly what it was—flesh.

"I've been up here since. Scavenging a little here and there, living off the soystuffers I still had lying around. I didn't go to work that night, well, last night. It's been a long day. My 'link got trashed and the comm too, so I'm a little out of the loop. So if you got any idea what's going on, I'd love a little intel. I'd be happy to hear it on the road. Now, can you get me out of here?"

for about five minutes before all that was left was some whining and mewling. I waited another ten minutes and peeked out to find the fog glowing orange. Something was on fire.

At first I was thinking it was can fires set up by the squatters for warmth, even though I don't think the temp dipped much below 27 all night, but it was the squatters. Their bodies were all over, all on fire, and the place stank. I wasn't going to risk getting caught by whatever got them, so I made my trip ashore quick. When I got back on the boat I put a little cleaning fluid on a towel and wrapped it around my face. It smelled for a little while, but eventually I didn't smell anything. I managed to doze a little here and there, but the nightmares were horrible.

Now that the sun's up, I'm packing up, slipping out, and scouring the dock here for a boat with keys. I wanted to sit still for a bit, but I'm going to have to do it somewhere else. Next news report, or journal entry depending on my mood, may be tonight if I can find somewhere to hide out.

MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2076 21:43

I found a nice little SeaDoo, utilized skills from my misspent youth, and tried jetting across the river. I ended up getting chased back over the locks—luckily the SeaDoo handles dings easily—and then run back to Island End by a KE patrol drone. I rolled up the river and the drone was still on my ass, so I bailed on the SeaDoo and let it clock another boat. No pyrotechnics, but the drone lost me. I'm just glad the thing didn't shoot at me. So today's reports will start in Chelsea, but first a few words from our sponsor.

First lockdown, then quarantine. I can't help but think it's exactly what happened in Chicago in the '50s, except there are no insect spirits as far as I've seen. Rumors are flying all over the Hub Grid, but no one is sure why we're quarantined. They just know that no one is allowed out of the city. Terrorists have done something to set this city down a dark path.

I spent a lot of time combing through rants last night trying to find those little nuggets of truth. I suspect the incident at the MIT&T lab, the dragon fight, and the rain are what started all this. I don't know how. I haven't gotten that deep. But after those incidents, there was a sudden rash of violence around MIT&T, followed by downtown, and then pockets all over the plex, all the way up to Salem. Now I'm getting pieces of some kind of sickness. It's not much, but it's a start.

I got a message from my mom. She asked if I was home and safe. I lied. She said the hospital is keeping everyone on site to deal with injuries. I asked about the quarantine. She didn't reply. Instead she just said she loved me and told me where to find the gun in the house. It was strange. It felt like pieces of the conversation were missing.

CHELSEA

Chelsea, like much of Boston along the waterways, is wall-to-wall people in the towers and between, so when an infection hits an area like this, it hits hard. The UCAS Naval Hospital is nearby. Though it's intended to serve only Navy personnel, the flood of sick that came in Thursday and Friday stuffed them beyond emergency capacity. Semi-trailers were being used as quarantine quarters and people from all over this area were pouring in, more each day. Nighttime was different, as the curfew forced the security personnel to turn away anyone coming at night. Their orders have been to shoot anyone who doesn't comply. There were incidents.

When the episodes of sudden violence and craziness began, they hit here hard, and those guards turned inward. Instead of trying to keep people out, they were trying to keep people in. They failed. Even if I hadn't met a survivor who was willing to tell me the story, I would have been able to tell by the sheer number of dead littering the grounds. I could still see people inside the hospital. I don't know if they are normal, psych patients, or whatever, but I wasn't willing to head in and look for trouble. I passed by here quickly and headed for old town Chelsea, hoping the people there had fared better than the hospital.

On the streets of Chelsea, the violence and chaos began the same way it had with downtown. First the squatters and a few others, mostly the ill; then that sickness came. It caused headaches, nausea, and disorientation, and got people brought over to the Naval Hospital. We know the tale of the hospital, but the crazies didn't come back to old town Chelsea.

The sickness of normal metahumanity came here instead. Chelsea got the first supply drop I've seen. At first the people of Chelsea all headed out to see what was on the four pallets of goods that dropped, but as soon as the first person grabbed a box it was a riot. I saw it from a distance, and it was horrible. The fighting left three dead in the street, and an unknown number of injured. The whole area had a feeling of edgy tension, and only one person was willing to talk to me. That's who told me about the Naval Hospital.

Chelsea has a feral edge to it right now. Maybe I'll get more if I come back this way.

FOUR POINTS SHERATON

Progressing north I found a small neighborhood with people willing to talk to me, mostly to get me to move on. They pointed me toward the Four Points Sheraton hotel. They said there was a shelter starting up there where anyone willing to do a little work was welcome to stay. I was still interested in settling down for a day, and I was definitely interested in seeing what it was all about, especially after the horror I had just seen in downtown Chelsea.

On the way I saw a few more ravaged supply drops, and I found a drop no one else had spotted. I grabbed some assorted rations and some medical supplies to use or trade. After I left I knocked on a few doors until someone answered and told them about the hidden supplies. I figured if they are willing to still open their door for a stranger, they deserved the kindness in return.

As for the Four Points, well, it's not what they said it was. All the cars in the lot were turned on their sides and used to build a wall around the place. When I got there the first thing they asked was whether I was armed and then told me I'd have to turn it over if I was to be allowed in. Instead of handing over my arms, I asked if anyone could come talk to me about what they were all about. It was strange asking someone to come out and talk about some post-apocalyptic helping hands group when just a few days ago I was playing Miracle Shooter with Kip and trying to figure out how I was going to get a job that didn't involve scrubbing toilets.

I got a taker and recorded the conversation, actually more of a sales pitch. [link]

I played like I was interested and claimed I wasn't alone and would need to go get my friend. Carl offered

to come with me, and I really couldn't refuse without raising suspicion. I walked toward some houses on the next block. Carl must have been onto me. Right before we cleared the corner and I figured I could run, he told me to hold up and turn around. When I did, he was pointing his pistol at me. He told me to drop the bags and then go get my "friend." He raised his gun to make air quotes, and I took a big chance. It was the smoothest draw I'd ever made, and I was shooting before he even realized I had moved. I think I fired about six shots and might have hit him twice, but one was right in the neck. Thank you Miracle Shooter: Tombstone.

I grabbed his gun and high-tailed it through the blocks and then cut south. I did a quick crossover by Route 107 and kept up a solid jog all the way back to West Revere. I ducked into a junior high for a breather and kept my eyes and ears peeled for anyone chasing me.

WEST REVERE

When I passed through West Revere I could see most of the stores had suffered some looting and the locals were busily boarding up homes while the sun was in the sky. I got a lot of threatening stares as I jogged by, and a few people even grabbed nearby tools, I'd assume to use as weapons if I were a threat. It was just more and more signs of the survivor mentality developing quickly.

After a quick break and meal at the school I headed back to West Revere. I was planning to pitch for a place in the community but when I got there the locals were chatting with half a dozen armed men who I guessed were from the hotel. The locals looked like they were refusing to talk, and then one of the men pulled out his gun and stuck it to a little girl's head. The locals quickly pointed in the direction I had gone.

Thanks to the damn fog, I was close enough to hear the guy say thank you before he pulled the trigger and shot the little girl. The people all around scattered, but the guys from the Four Points gunned them down. They grabbed all the kids, and two of the goons took them back toward the hotel while Carl and the others headed off the way I had gone.

I considered my options. I finally settled on the only option that fit both my survival instinct and my conscience. Once the goons were out of sight I fired up my 'link and sent a message to the 'link of the man cradling the small girl in his arms. I told him where those men had come from and apologized for bringing trouble. Then I broke into a nearby basement and cried for that little girl.

Now I'll do my best to try to sleep and forget the nightmares I know are coming.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2076 08:35

The quarantine around Boston is in full effect. Communications are up on the Hub grid, but most of the time the interference is too bad to get anything through. I've gotten the government message like everyone else, but I can't believe this is any normal encephalitis virus. It's something more.

Jinx mentioned nanobots, and I remember some news blips this past year about nanotech issues. It might mean something. Man, I wish I was smart like the guys at MIT&T. I need to keep moving. At least get out of this area. The messages I'm getting say the quarantine locks in everything inside the 95/128/93 ring around the city. Time to take a look around.

CARL LEFOREST, HUMAN, 27 YEARS OLD

"I think you'd really find a home here at Four Points. We're not a bunch a survivalists. We have a few guys like that who work the walls, and a few others who patrol the halls. Most of the rest of us spend our time relaxing and only occasionally head out to carry back some supplies. We haven't lost anyone and we're a hundred percent clean of encephalitis. You're more than welcome to come on in and give it a look. If you don't like it, on your way you go. It's really a nice place. As for my thoughts on the quarantine: We're getting supply drops, so I don't think it will be over right away, but at least we're being taken care of. I think it's better to stock up and be happy when it lifts than it is to think it will lift, not stock up, and have to resort to unpleasantries when we are still in here for the winter. It could happen. I don't want it to, but it sure could. So, what's the call? Take a look inside?"

TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2076 22:31

"Today is a day that will live in infamy." Unknown (at least to me).

I needed that little laugh. Around noon today I wasn't sure why I'm doing this. Tonight, as I sit here alone, miles from where I started, I'm wondering how I could have felt that way only seven hours ago. Time inside the QZ is a strange thing. The QZ, or "cues" as some folks are starting to say, is what this place is now called. We have a name; we are in trouble. Okay, now, for today's report.

Big news item for today: The megacorporate grids are back. They don't link to the outside, just within the local Hub grid, but at least they have some searchable datanets. They aren't all here though. NeoNET (big surprise), Aztechnology, Ares, Evo, Horizon, Mitsuhama, Renraku, and Shiawase all have grids up. No Saeder-Krupp or Wuxing. Maybe they're just not ready yet. It's strange. I figured if they were up they'd be linked globally and we'd finally be able to talk to the outside world, but nope. They just have their own grids inside the QZ.

Today's second big story is the fog. Or better, the lack of fog. For a few days there I thought it was never going to lift, but sometime last night the fog pulled back. It looks

JETHAL GOOLSBY, HUMAN, 28 YEARS OLD

"I'm not even from here. I live in Providence. I took the train up and when they shut the lines down I decided to stay out here instead of piling into downtown. Good choice, from what I hear. I'm good staying here for now, but I really want to get a message out to my wife that I'm okay. Can't wait until we get constant power and the public grid back. I'm sure she's worried about me. I don't know what I think of the quarantine. Makes me a little nervous. I remember reading about Chicago in my history class, and this reminds me of what they did there. I don't know how I'd handle five years away from my wife. You know, I haven't seen any bugs or anything. I think the corps can clear this up quicker than that."

SHARONNE WASHINGTON, DWARF, 21 YEARS OLD

"I coulda been down in that craziness, you know. I was supposed to cover Lavonia's shift at the Towers, but she gave it to Frankie. Such a slitch. I'm sure he's digitizing her artwork, if you know what I mean. I'm fine out here. Pheter almost cried when he saw me walk out this morning. He thought I was downtown. Now I'm sure he's got a thing for me. Might as well hook up. Nothing else to do for a while. I'm sure as sheen not hoofing it downtown into the trouble we've heard about there just to tell them I can't make it in for my shift. Maybe once the grid's not so glitchy I'll call. Or maybe they can just keep their job and stick it where the sun ain't shining. I'm thinking I'll relax while I can. This is the first day I've had off in two months. Excuse me, I'm gonna go find Pheter and chill."

COLTUN DAVIS, HUMAN, 72 YEARS OLD

"I'm too old to care, kid. What do I think? What do you care what I think? Nobody listens to their elders. Not that it's a new thing. I didn't listen either. Had to make all my mistakes on my own. Last mistake I made, move to Boston thinking it would be better than Chicago. I'm bad luck, kid. I managed to clear the Chicago Containment Zone before they really locked it down, but I stuck it out nearby hoping to help anybody else out who needed it. Know what I got? Nothing. I didn't help a single person. In fact, I didn't get to see a single other survivor before I moved out. Now, twenty years later I'm inside this zone, and there's not a single thing I'm going to do about it. I'm too old. Maybe I should have been inside the other one, too. Maybe this is karma coming back to bite me in the rear. You wanted thoughts on the quarantine? We're hosed. I've heard they're putting up a wall to keep us in. They're also the ones blocking out the airspace over our heads. That fog ain't natural. I heard it runs the whole border, and they're keeping people cleared back for a few kilometers. They really don't want anyone to see what's going on inside here. Best find a nice, quiet—or better yet, secure—place to stay and start stockpiling. It's not bad now in the heat of summer, but winter is going to be a chilly bitch."

CREVE ASDINGOTE, ELF, 12 YEARS OLD

"I'm cool for now. I hope they ask me to do a few supply runs. I'd love to get out there and explore. Hey, can I come with you? I'd be a lot of help if you let me. I can carry your pack or something. Maybe find a video recorder and make this a video diary instead of just a recording. That could be cool. We could show the world what's really happening in here once we get the outside grid back. I'm actually not from here. My mom and I were here visiting my uncle. She was downtown with my aunt and hasn't made it back out yet. I know you've moved around a bit but my mom's not that active. She had a surgery to help, a nanohive to help scrub her blood, but it didn't help that much. It was super cheap because everyone is all scared about the nanites, but I did some research and all this is a scare tactic. I'm sure they have some sweet futuristic nanotech that they just don't want anyone knowing about, so they start a rumor to keep people from digging or trusting, but someone will make it okay again to use it. That's what Mr. Gomez said anyway. He doesn't think nanotech has any problems. He has quite a few systems. Super cool."

like it has moved out onto the water and west of the city, and it's still hanging above, but I'll take cloudy over foggy any day. There was no big temperature change, rain, or winds, just a sudden dissipation and retreat of the fog. I smell a story, but this place is so full of stories I really can't chase them all. I'll just accept that the fog is gone.

People all over are getting defensive and territorial. I was shot at a few times, not sure if they missed or were just warning me, but every time I started running in what I hoped was the right direction in their opinion. Thanks to the incentive, it didn't take long to get the few blocks to Highway 1.

I was so fixated on watching out for trouble and following the highway I completely failed to realize I was walking toward the Four Points. I'd also failed to notice the tail I had picked up.

I was out in the open up on Highway 1 when I realized what was up, and the Four Points guards started shooting. I went to backtrack only to be shot at from that way too. I dove down into the underbrush by the highway and booked it through the trees until I hit an underpass. I stuck to cover and ran for dear life.

Life didn't get any less interesting for me right after that because I still had to get clear, and the only way out was toward the marsh to the north. I schlepped through calf-deep muck for over an hour before I hit solid pavement again. This was the point I started wondering what the hell I was doing, but I guess that's what calf-deep mud does to a man.

FRANKLIN PARK

That's where my next local highlight began, with the small survivor community of Franklin Park. Franklin Park

citizens quickly came together and fortified their condoplex but gladly welcomed outsiders who were displaced. Since then, they've stopped, and they asked me to move on once I'd had a small break, but they at least gave me some water and an hour to rest my feet, which I used to get their stories.

I'm not a good enough reporter to really give the story for the people of Franklin Park, so I'll let them tell their tales. [link]

I was thankful for the hospitality I got and even offered to leave them some rations, but instead they stocked me back up. They were nice enough to let me clean up in the pool and seemed honestly disappointed when I left even though it was their rule. They gave me all the warnings about the crazies and staying away from Highway 1 to avoid the go-gangers, and they made sure to tell me over and over it was only going to get worse.

I don't know why, but after visiting the folks in Franklin Park I really didn't want to talk to anyone else. I stuck mainly to the small woodsy patches that still clung between neighborhoods, megamalls, and corporate towers. It was rough going, and my legs finally said no more just south of Walden Pond.

I broke into this quaint little ten-bedroom monstrosity and found the lack of power and comm service to my advantage for the first time. No power, no grid, no alarm. I'm going to set a few traps down on the first floor and the stairs and crash on the third floor. One of the rooms gives a great view of the pond and the moon's kind of pretty tonight. I'm sure there are neighbors here, too, but I plan to keep the light to a minimum.

Goodnight Nobodies and No Ones.

WED., JUNE 10, 2076 12:04

It's getting worse, and there is something seriously wrong. Not that I didn't know that before, but it just keeps getting drilled deeper and deeper in. Today, you get a midday report, just in case I don't survive the day like I almost didn't survive the night. Let me backtrack for you.

About 0300 I woke to the sound of breaking glass. I quietly gathered up my goods and waited for whatever warning was coming. Maybe a police warning, maybe a homeowner giving the classic, "I've got a gun." Primo stupid by the way. Even I know better. Still, I keep waiting. I can hear shuffling and moving around, and I realize it's more than one person, but still no one has called out any kind of warning.

I held my ground there for what seemed like an eternity but was really only about ten minutes, before I just had to take a peek and see if maybe the window was my best option.

Well, the fucking door squeaked. That tiny sound was quickly followed by faster footsteps and, as best I can describe, mewling. It was like a bad flatvid zombie flick. I bolted for the window and grabbed my bag along the way before swinging out the window onto the roof below. What I saw then was worse than some flatvid zombie flick. It was live and in trideo. The cul-de-sac I was housing in was filled with people, but they were all shuffling around and bumping into each other and muttering. I swear I heard the fucking "warn Cerberus" shit again, but my brain may have made that up. It was more of a low humming mumble.

Until they spotted me. Then it was pointing, screeching, and running. The whole group bolted for the house I was in, and one of the ones that was already in the house reached the window and leapt out. I whipped out the Predator and really considered sticking it in my own mouth for an instant, but anger got the better of me and I decided I'd take a few of them with me first.

The rest is a blur of shooting, running, and fearing for my life. I ran clean off the roof, across the community, and into the woods while they all started to chase me. I found Highway 1 again and shot north on the flat terrain to get some space and a lead. I was about crapped out and the pack was on my ass when I stumbled into some serious luck and ran smack dab into the edge of the QZ.

I should have known by the fog. It was ahead of me, and I ran right into it in hopes of making a quick turn once out of sight then finding somewhere to catch my breath. I heard the rotors of the drones first and then the loudspeakers blared to life, "You are approaching the edge of the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Zone. For your own safety please turn around and return to your home. The NEMA Quarantine Coalition is working hard to end this situation as quickly as possible. Please return to your home." The line finished as the drone appeared in the air in front of me. Then the speech rolled over again before the drone brought the barrel of its turret to bear on me. Needless to say I turned around. Right into the approaching mob.

I was about to raise the Predator up, not sure if it was to shoot myself or them, when the rotodrone above me opened up with its turret. It started tearing into the front row of the mob, so I didn't bother with the puny pistol and pushed my legs for one last burst.

Or at least what I thought was one last burst. Instead, I went off the highway and right into a fence with a giant MCT logo on it. My 'link started to beep at me and I knew it was some kind of warning, so I skirted the fence and stumbled along on exhausted legs. I realized I was up near the Corridor at this point and didn't have much hope of getting clear of corporate property when my legs finally gave. I crawled into a ditch and down into a drain pipe under the road and waited for either corp security or the crazies to find me.

Obviously that didn't happen. I woke up around sunup and crawled out of the drain. My legs were still sore, but I managed to hobble out a little ways from the corp facilities that line 128 and found some of the older, smaller neighborhoods that were long ago abandoned for the security of corporate fences or towers.

I followed some of the local neighborhood streets east and kept peeking north whenever I had a clear view. The whole way was a wall of fog just at the edge of the highway. Coltun was right. Natural fog doesn't do that. I saw drones pop in and out of the fog every once in awhile, and at one of the overpasses I saw the hazy outline of a big black truck. I think it was a Bison, but with the fog and the distance I couldn't tell. And I wasn't getting any closer.

For now I'm tucked away and getting a little more rest in Needham Corner. There's more than enough empty houses to hide in out here past all the corporate labs and complexes that line the highway. There's my news for Needham Corner. Where I am is pretty empty and I'm happy I don't see any people, of the crazy or normal variety, right now.

WED., JUNE 10, 2076 20:54

I'll get this stuff down just to update, but I need to get some sleep and hopefully I'll be able to walk tomorrow. Might need another day of rest.

I spent most of the day trying to stretch out my legs by walking around in this house, but it was more like hobbling than walking. I'm just not in the shape for this. No matter, I got some good out of it. I have a decent view from the attic window in this place, and I can see over to the corporate labs along the Corridor. I found an old pair of real binoculars in a dresser up there. Took me a while to figure out how to focus them—makes me appreciate autofocus. I was expecting to see the people at the corp labs moving freely across the border, but instead they were all kept back from the edge of their complexes near the highway. I even saw one of the drones fire on an upper-floor window when someone stayed up there too long.

The corps out here aren't even getting a break. I don't know if that's good or bad. I'm happy they aren't getting special treatment, but it's got to be serious for them to be locked in here too. What is going on?

Not all the facilities are inhabited anymore. It looks like the megas have been selective in what they want to save. Some of the other spots look to be looted, and I'm almost positive I saw some shadowrunners moving around out there, probably looting the empty sites or scouting the occupied ones. I spotted some of the shambling people inside the fences and on the upper floors of a building at a NeoNET complex.

More tomorrow.

THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2076 13:14

This morning I reluctantly left the house and started east. It was slow going since my legs are still sore, and I can't stop looking over my shoulder for a tail or a pack of crazies. Almost every person I saw today, I avoided. So far I've been moving mostly through the wooded areas that are abundant around here thanks to the locals. If Salem's good for something, it's protecting nature. I briefly checked out Peabody, but I got the feeling most of the people there weren't well. Most of the houses had black or red crosses painted on the doors, and the few people out walking around were armed and wearing masks. I don't think they were trying to keep people out as much as keep people in. A few of the houses in the area had signs of violence—broken windows, bullet holes, dried blood, that kind of thing.

Sneaking around Peabody, I made it to the water and saw the drones popping in and out of the fog out over the river. I skirted the edge of the water, spotted some patrol boats just floating out there with black-clad soldiers manning the guns, and I didn't run into any more trouble until I hit the north edge of Salem.

I was making a quick cut through Greenlawn Cemetery to avoid the open ground around the old country club when out of nowhere—and I mean that quite literally—a woman in a white flowing dress appeared. I was freaking and thinking ghost and wanted to draw my gun (for all the good that would do me), but I was frozen stiff with fear. It was lucky for me. A nice talk with the spirit of man (or is it woman?) calling itself Elaida revealed to me that she had orders to knock me out and bring me to her mistress if I was a threat. I took "mistress" to mean "summoner," though I know about as much about magic as I do about astrophysics. She actually gave me a brief interview and then warned me to stay away from Salem. Unawakened were rarely welcomed, as she put it. [link]

Three dragons have been up here since this all started. Something must be up. I wish she was able to say more, but I wasn't about to push my luck. She, or it, told me to stick near the water and she'd let me pass. I wasn't going to disobey, so I stayed out near the edge of the water. Problem was Elaida wasn't the only guard on duty and the east side of Salem is right on the water. I ended up with a pack of wild dogs on my tail and had to steal a boat. Sadly it was a rowboat, so my arms are now as exhausted as my legs were. But I managed to get across the river to Marblehead.

MARBLEHEAD

There are certain advantages to living out on a peninsula, especially when it comes to cutting off easy access to your home. The people of Marblehead have set up roadblocks on the three main roads coming into the area and have a few roving patrols around the forested and coastal areas. They only really pay attention to the direction of Salem over the water, because the quarantine zone doesn't include Envirotech Island. The corporate-owned land preserve is being used as a base of operations for the quarantine forces, and they've cut off access to the island over the bridge. Something the people of Marblehead found out the hard way while trying to look for corporate help.

Daniel Clark (D): The recording is going. I hope it picks you up.

Elaida, Salem spirit (E): In this form, it should. I speak as you do, through sound, not through your mind.

D: Great. So, what's going on up here in Salem? It seems … busy.

E: Perceptive. Many threads weave through the man-realm of Salem. I could speak on the bitter battle of land rights between Mistress Dorn and Miss Farnsworth. The proximity of their gardens has lead to some cross-pollination that has made Miss Dorn quite upset. Does that interest you?

D: I don't mean to be rude, but not really. I'm more interested on events related to the quarantine.

E: Quarantine?

D: Yes. The guard keeping us from crossing this river, for example.

E: My summoner's orders keep me from crossing the river.

D: I'm not sure how to explain it. There are people on the other side of the river keeping the rest of us from crossing over. If we try, they attack us.

E: Like I am ordered to do with anyone coming here with harmful intent?

D: Kind of, but we don't have harmful intent. We just don't want to be trapped here anymore.

E: Hmmm … a feeling I understand.

D: Sorry. Anyone new come to Salem lately?

E: None that I can speak of. My summoner forbids it.

D: Was it the dragon? I heard it flew north. Is it here?

E: My master forbids me to speak of briste dragan.

D: Briste dragan? Who's that?

E: My master forbids me to speak of him.

D: Can we speak of Damon?

E: Fear dragan?

D: Fear dragon? I thought he was nice. Well, as nice as any dragon can be.

E: Fear is man to you. We call him the man-dragon for the shape he prefers. He seeks to mimic the power of his betters. Many are not happy for that.

D: Has he been up here?

E: He was, but the unmentionable one told us to send him away. It was the same with meaisín dragan. Both were sent away.

D: Why?

E: I do not question.

D: Can you help me look around Salem?

E: I cannot. I must patrol.

D: Can you tell me where it would be safe to travel?

E: Follow the water's edge and I shall let you pass. Make no threat against me or any other who lives here and you will be allowed to pass.

D: Thank you, Elaida.

E: You are welcome, Danielclark.

Speaking of corporate help, the Marblehead Knight Errant station is well-staffed—almost too well-staffed. They have a lot of officers there but don't seem like they are focused on protecting Marblehead. They rarely patrol according to the people in town, and they've sent a lot of patrols out to cruise near Salem and Peabody. Sounds more like they're spying on those places than protecting and serving Marblehead.

I traded a copy of my journal to them for their stories and even shared lunch. Marblehead is nice—the infection doesn't seem to have hit them much, but they are close to Salem. From what they've said, the witches of Salem are not friendly neighbors right now. I should have asked Elaida. Oh, well. I'm heading south from here. I know the north end of the QZ, I can guess that the water makes the east edge, but I'll walk south and see how it is fairing back that way. I'll report again tonight as long as I can lift my arms to activate the commlink.

One personal note. No word from my mom. Though I haven't been able to get messages from anyone further than Swampscott today.

THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2076 21:52

I didn't make it too far before I had to collapse again. I found another school to crash in. I've got a nice little corner of the basement with no windows, so I can actually use some lights. It was nice to actually see my dinner today. I bet you're wondering how I spent all that other time after I had to stop walking. My brain was still clipping along at the thousand kph speed it has been since all this began, so I couldn't fall asleep. But my body was exhausted, so I gave it a break.

I've been hanging out on the Hub grid, fighting through the noise, and gathering more information for my news stories. I'll copy a few together and link them into here, but I can't link everything. Not because I don't have the memory space, but because a good journalist can't just post junk. [link]

So the last one is a bit out there, but it fits with what others have mentioned in my travels. All of this is very interesting and really makes me want to keep pushing on and getting everything I can firsthand. Now that the grid

NORTHEASTERN METROPLEX AXIS QUARANTINE SECURITY COALITION: PUBLIC SAFETY ANNOUNCEMENT

Citizens of the NEMA quarantine are hereby advised to minimize social exposure to all other citizens due to the outbreak of a highly contagious encephalitic virus. Symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, blackouts, memory loss, involuntary muscular spasms, and temporary sensory loss. If you have any of these symptoms, please contact your nearest quarantine active medical center for further detailed instructions. Do not contact other individuals to care for you as the virus is highly contagious, and even standard precautions are proving ineffective against the transmittal of this virus. Thank you for your continued cooperation.

THE BAKED BEANTOWN BLOG: I SAW THE DRAGON!!!

I'm telling you all, I had a clear view of the whole scene. I missed the start, but I got all the good goodies. The so-called "Iridescent Dragon"—I was totally thinking it was Damon and some wicked awesome stunt, but I've seen Damon and it wasn't him. This wicked awesome dragon was flying up from over by Cambridge across the river. It looked like it was having trouble flying and almost like it was writhing in the air. It flew higher and I was having a hard time seeing it, then it started spitting fire at the north NeoNET tower downtown. It was frying the building, spitting flameballs and gouts of flame, melting chunks off the side of the tower, and then all of a sudden, BOOM!!! It gets rocked by something I couldn't see. Must have been magic. I totally wish I had been flipping when it happened. That would have been wicked awesome. Anyways. I saw the shiny one get rocked. He flew, not under his own power, through the air and right into Fenway. It was awesome. Some of whatever was making him iridescent came off when he was hit and went FLYING!!! It started slowly falling to the ground like this wicked awesome iridescent rain. I would have been stickered to be down there, but then I would have missed seeing the other dragon. Yep, I saw him. And it was … CELEDYR. I totally recognized him. He was sitting up on top of the western NeoNET tower, just glaring at the other dragon. When I looked back at the beatdown dragon, he was back up and taking off. He made another beeline for the towers and then banked off hard. When I looked up again, Celedyr was gone too. I'm marking this day in the history of my life. I saw two dragons! Wicked awesome!

QUARANTINE COUNT: DAY 2—WATCHING THE WALLS GROW

This isn't good. From my attic window I can see the border of the QZ. The damn fog was blocking my view, but I happened to remember the Zeiss my wife got me for birdwatching has thermal optics. I've been watching in hopes of seeing a sign that the quarantine was opening up or moving in as they clear blocks. Instead, what I'm seeing is construction. Overnight they rolled heavy construction vehicles through and bulldozed the block on the other side of the interstate. They dumped the rubble into one of those massive construction processors, like we saw all over the trid in Bogota after the war, and used it to start building a wall. They put up over a hundred meters last night. I think they're making this permanent, like Chicago. I don't think I can live in here like that. What's in here that they need to wall off? What's really happening? Anyone else out there seeing this?

SHININGKNIGHTBLOG: DOWNTOWN ON THE GROUND

Ladies and gentlemen of the plex, you can be calm now. ShiningKnight has your news from the Hub. I had a first-hand view and now have the bird's eye, to tell you everything that's been happening on the ground downtown. It's important for everyone to know, but Knight Errant has everything under control. Please don't try to take your safety into your own hands. Make sure the EmergencyLink system is relinked to the new QZ grid, and remember your personal emergency code is the first two letters and the last four numbers of your SIN. As for happenings in the Hub, we have discontinued standard patrols on the street now that everyone is obeying the new traffic patterns and avoiding the streets of the Hub. Special Response Units are now replacing those patrols and working to detain and quarantine those suffering from the encephalitis epidemic. Please be sure to inform your local health service facility if you or anyone you know is showing signs of encephalitis. Signs and symptoms can be found on your health service facilities host as well as the NEMAQSF health notifications host. Knight Errant is also looking for qualified individuals to join their team and help maintain order within the QZ while we await the lifting of the quarantine. Interested individuals can report to any local KE station. KE asks that no individuals who are currently suffering from or have suffered from encephalitis apply at this time. Thanks again for your continued cooperation and remember, Knight Errant is always ready to charge to your aid.

QUITTING THE QUARANTINE: WE CAN'T LET THIS STAND

Stand apart from the sheep and join me as I seek to tear down the walls and push forth back into the world from which we have been torn. Do not let the megacorporations and government devils restrain our freedoms. We are not animals to be caged. We are citizens of Boston, the original revolutionaries. Our tea party will not be about taxation of our wallets but taxation of our

lives. They have stolen our freedom. We must push through the blockade they have on our souls and show them that the sickness is not ours, it is theirs. They are the virus, they are the diseased, we are the cure. I look out at the faces of those around me and I see not the Bostonian spirit of revolution. That spirit hides behind the cowed eyes of corporate rhetoric and governmental lies. They want us to be empty consumers, to not question the truth of this quarantine, and instead buy into it and sit idly by as they allow this virus to run its course and take hundreds of thousands of lives. We will all die in here. They will not open up or tear down the walls they have built. They will free their towers and let the lofty corporate masters fly to freedom, but for those who walk the earth, the placated cattle, there will be no flight to freedom. There will be a wall to mark the edge of our hospice house. We must join together and push for our freedom. Seek me out. I will know my fellow revolutionaries, and we will gather and press our bodies to their walls until they crumble before our masses.

TRUTHBETOLD: VIRAL LIES

I am a doctor of medicine. I will not tell my name or credentials for they would make me a target, but trust that I hold true to my oaths and seek to do no harm. To keep you all free from harm I must reveal a truth; a truth that those who hold the keys to the prison will never tell you. The encephalitis virus is not the cause for this quarantine. In fact, there is no encephalitis virus. It's a veil to hide the truth behind. A truth far darker.

The cause of our headaches and our memory loss is not a swelling of our brains. It is a rewriting of our minds. We are being rewired. We are being rewritten. We are being overwritten. Our minds are being stolen from us one memory at a time. I have spent the last few days buried beneath the tidal wave of victims whose pain I can find no cause for. Their brain is not swelling, they have no fever, but yet they are tagged with the label of encephalitis. This is not the truth.

I have not had time to find the full cause or reason behind it. What I have found is a similarity in every victim. A universal factor contained by every single person who has come in and suffers from the debilitating headaches, the spasms, and the memory lapse.

Nanobots. Every single "encephalitis" sufferer has traces of nanites in their blood and tissue. It is the one factor present across the board. The one reason why those who have us quarantined would cripple the medical professionals and take away so many of our tools with their ridiculous rules and commands. No MRIs for encephalitis? Ridiculous. No MRIs for a person with nanites in their system? Good plan, because if you used an MRI, it would likely kill them.

I don't hold the answer to who, or what, or why, but I know what we have been told is false. We must seek out the truth for ourselves. It may be the only way we will ever see the freedom we used to know.

is a little more accessible, I think a lot of things are going to change. The curfew is still in effect and everyone is supposed to be on power restrictions, but maybe life can get a little more normal inside the QZ. I read a lot more than I posted there and I'm exhausted now, but we'll see how well I sleep. After last night and all of the horror stories I just read, I don't think sleep will be pleasant.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 2076 17:43

I made a friend today. I'm not sure he'd say the same thing, but this is my journal, not his. We met while I was out on my first trip to look around Salem. I've decided a lot of things are going on elsewhere, but since I'm up here I want to give Salem a thorough looking over before I head out. For that, I'm going to stay here at Swampscott High School, sponsored by Aztechnology, and make daily and nightly excursions into Salem.

I'm hoping A.J. (that's my new friend) will help me, but first he needs to get a little rest. He was being attacked by this freaky lizard thing when I saved him. I looked it up on the grid, and I think it's a basilisk. I'm sure it was Awakened because its eyes were glowing a little and A.J. was moving really slow and his skin was turning grey while I watched. I probably should have shot the thing sooner, but I was just wicked enthralled by what was happening. Then when I went to shoot, I thought it might be best if I really took aim. I didn't want to be its next target.

I shot it right in its glowing little eyeball, which didn't actually kill it like I expected. It just made a loud hissing roar noise and ran away. A.J. was hardly able to move, so I helped him back to my base at SHS. He rested for a few hours, and when I finally got to talk to him he confirmed the thing that attacked him was a basilisk and told me that if I hadn't popped it he'd be a nice stone statue in the woods right now. He's willing to help me out on my excursions as long as I listen to him. He must think I'm new at this. He told me that before the QZ he was an independent negotiator. I think he was a shadowrunner, but he balked at that idea—more proof I was right.

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 2076 23:47

A.J. and I went out to get supplies today. We stalked a drop spot and did a "grab and go," as A.J. called it. Got shot at by another group after the same drop. I don't

know what I'd do without A.J. on something like that, other than probably avoid it entirely. A.J. warned me away from some stuff on the drops. He said that some places have had issues with those foods. He thinks the corps are doping some of the food to test cures for what's going on. I'd believe it. Kinda glad I didn't grow up a corpkid right now.

That wasn't even the wildest part of my day. After we dropped the food back here at the school, we took another trip because A.J. said work offers were coming in for intel on what's happening in Salem. We were in the perfect place, and A.J. said they were offering 5,000 for the right kind of data. I'm not sure what I'd do with 5k in here, but I'd be happy to squirrel it away for the day I can use it. Especially for something I was doing already.

Anyway, we went out to take a look around and a patrol got us separated. I was planning on sitting tight and just waiting when the shouting started and I could hear someone running toward me. There were a few explosions and then gunfire, but I spotted the runner headed right at me. He was almost on me when he was hit from behind and tumbled right to my feet. He was looking up at me, blood coming from his mouth, and he jammed something into my hands and said "run." Before I realized what was happening, I was running.

I sprinted all the way back to the school and then collapsed. I felt like my lungs were on fire most of the way, but I couldn't stop. My lungs still hurt, and it's been hours. The thing he handed me was a commlink. Nothing really good on it, but A.J. found an encrypted file entitled *Salem Exposed!* We can't get into it, but he said he might know some people.

I think after Salem is done I'm going to try and get the scoop on the Hub. A.J. is teaching me a lot, but I get a little pissed when he treats me like a kid. I'll ask him if he wants in on the Hub project, but if he says no I'm fine with that. I'll go it alone. I'm not sure I'll get much on Salem even after all this. That place is locked up tight in most spots. Even with A.J.'s help it's been hard to get around. Lots of corpo ... huh ... what is it A.J. I'm recording? Now? Okay, okay, I'm coming.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2076 21:00

Fucking corps and fucking kid. This has been one hell of a day. Swampscott High now belongs to Aztechnology in more than just sponsorship. Around midnight, night before last night, a force of no less than fifty Aztechnology corporate security officers rolled into the school and started securing it room by room. D.C. (the original author of this piece) and I heard them over the commlinks we had set up around the building, but the secmen were quick to find those. We had a plan, and the kid followed it perfectly. We were out and moving away from the school totally unnoticed.

From the vehicles and hardware we saw in the lot, I think they were setting up a long-term post. It's a solid idea for a large group. The school offers showers, food production, exercise facilities, and plenty of space for bedding. It was nice while it lasted.

Since we had already done so much looking around up north, we headed south. The kid wanted to check out Lynn. He'd heard a bunch of "terror-blogs," as he called them, and wanted to see whether it was chiptruth or beetle-bullshit. I got the full rundown while we walked, and he said that the locals were talking about the sick people recovering but not being the same afterward. Like the encephalitis suddenly changed all their personalities. I'd heard of things like this before in stroke victims. One day they're the nicest guy in the world, and the next they're screaming at you for walking on their lawn. D.C. pushed his case and kept saying that it wasn't like a mood change, it was a personality change. Like one day they're Daniel Clark and the next they're A.J. I just listened after that. Sounded way out in left field, but I wasn't about to go discounting anything since I've seen my fair share of "that shouldn't be" in my lifetime.

Turns out the kid might be onto something.

Lynn isn't much of a town anymore. More of a strange slave camp. Most of the town is now based around the Lynn Area DocWagon Hospital Complex and the section of town just north of that. The bulk of the rest of the town has been either knocked down, burnt to the ground, or converted into little walled-off enclaves. The whole area is a warzone. The first time we tried to approach one of the walled enclaves, we were shot at. D.C. had to send a message to someone inside to verify who he was and the work that he'd been doing in the area. He actually used his journal and a copy of the encrypted *Salem Exposed!* file to get us in.

Inside it was a nightmare. Wounded everywhere and everyone strung out and exhausted. I thought I'd walked into a war trid. The leader gave D.C. an interview. [link] And damn, that's some crazy shit. I don't think it's encephalitis, but aliens? Really? I see what the kid meant when he told me Blaize was a little off in the head.

I wasn't in on that conversation. I was out trying to help tend to the injured and work up enough goodwill to maybe get a couple bullets for my trouble or at least open them up to trade, but I didn't get very far. Not because I'm not good at that kind of thing, I'm actually really good at it, but because you can't get blood from a turnip. They were as dry on supplies as we were. Worse off, in fact. But they weren't alone. I learned that much.

D.C. (D): Commander Blaize, thank you for this opportunity to interview you for my work. Would you mind introducing yourself to my audience?

Commander Ashindar Blaize (B): It's my pleasure, young man. Happy to pass my knowledge on to your avid audience. My name is Ashindar Blaize, commander of the True Lynnians Coalition. Everybody just needs a little TLC.

D: I like it. Catchy. How did you get elected leader of the TLC?

B: No elections, son. I stepped up when the people needed me, and they rewarded me with their allegiance against the invaders.

D: Invaders? You mean the gangs?

B: No, young man, the invaders. The things that have taken possession of all those shambling and psychotic shells running around out there.

D: The victims of the encephalitis?

B: Encephalitis? It's nice to see a young man who isn't a cynic, but boy, don't be fooled. The corporations are lying to us. There's no encephalitis. This is all an invasion, but they caught it early and stalled the enemy's forces here in the QZ. Now we have to fight them to earn our freedom.

D: But these people are Boston residents. They didn't come from anywhere else.

B: Those empty shells aren't Bostonians anymore. The invaders have stolen their minds. Made them blank slates to be overwritten. They just haven't had time or been able to get to them all yet. The encephalitis was some kind of mind preparation to make them easier to overtake.

D: Where are the invaders from?

B: I haven't taken the time to ask, son. Been busy trying not to get killed by them. Could be a megacorp, or Aztlan, maybe the CAS. Not sure. Could be metaplanar too. Or alien. All that messing around on Mars can't be good for us. And they had that blackout awhile back. Might have been the start for them then.

D: Amazing. I definitely have a new direction to start looking in my work. Thank you, Commander Blaize.

B: My pleasure, young man.

Lynn had basically separated into four little enclaves like the one we visited, surrounding the central strip where the "body snatchers" (their term) were based. The enclaves were taking over the grid and asking everybody for help, but no one was listening. The only offer of help they got back was from a "body snatcher" trying to convince them to just join them, like some creepy cult.

D.C. got his interview and we were getting ready to bed down when the place sounded an alarm. D.C. and I joined the watch up on the wall for all of about ten seconds before I decided it was best to relocate again. A massive mob of people was coming at the enclave on the main street. Most of the group was moving in this strange "humanoid" lope, but the leaders were sprinting like their lives depended on it.

As soon as Commander Blaize issued the order to open fire, I grabbed D.C. and pulled him off the wall. The kid really wanted to fight it out, but I knew from the enclave's resources and the force coming in they were doomed. I had to fight the kid the entire time just to slip out the back gate, and even once we were out the kid thought we were planning some kind of stealth flanking maneuver.

When I finally got it through his thick skull that we were making a strategic retreat, he refused to believe we could leave these people to their fate. He gave me the classic, "You may be willing to give up on them, but I'm not" line, like this was some kind of action trid drama, and then ran off. I should have just bailed on him but instead I followed, not out of some obligation to Blaize and his doomed followers, but because I knew what the kid was doing. He was trying to prove a point.

Well, Daniel, point made. You've proven that you still have the same naive view of the world as all the corporate sheltered brats despite your upbringing on the streets and haven't been made a cynic by real life. You aggravating little shit. You had to go running off and getting yourself killed just when you actually managed to teach me a lesson about helping other people for more than just my cut of the profits.

FUCK!!!

WED., JUNE 17, 2076 22:32

I've calmed a bit. I guess I can just say it now.

Daniel Clark, age 19, died June 15, 2076, from wounds suffered while trying to defend the True Lynnians Coalition Enclave against an overwhelming force from the nearby Lynn Area DocWagon Hospital Complex. He fought valiantly and died with an empty Predator in his hands, bodies at his feet, and arms still swinging.

He was a good kid, and after reading what he's done so far, I'll try to honor him by making reports on the areas I pass through. If I ever get the chance, I'll get this out to the world. The kid would have liked that.

For right now, I'm tired after running from the attacks the other night and getting here and ducking the locals. I managed to slip onto the Nahant peninsula

while the guards were dealing with loping psychopaths from Lynn. I've been taking a peek around this place by daylight, but it's tough since I'm pretty sure I need to stay out of sight. This isn't a very big place, and I think all the big-money folks who live here know each other.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2076 12:30

Not sure I'll do this as well as the kid, but here goes.

NAHANT

Nahant is a sequestered paradise just off the coast of hell. The citizens of Nahant are still denizens of the QZ, but they have managed to be virtually unscathed by both the virus and the cessation of civilized behavior. Thanks to the presence of an already-impressive security force and the immediate and unflinching obedience to the no-travel rules of the quarantine, the peninsula has been saved from the chaos by the diligence of Knight Errant.

Knight Errant is the primary security provider for the city but also contracted so heavily as private security for the residents of Nahant that they have a station on the peninsula. This station is receiving food, medical supplies, and munitions as well. The town of Nahant is firmly under the thumb of KE, which also makes it safe beneath their watchful gaze.

That's my report. I don't know how that kid managed to do as many as he did. I'm not a journalist, and I hate report writing.

FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 2076, 12:58

I can't give up that quick. KE patrols the whole place, and this morning they inspected every home to look for potentially infected individuals. Suspects are immediately taken from their homes and brought to the local quarantine center in Little Nahant. There were two today.

Around 11 a.m. they brought a guy out to the road. They gave him a small satchel of supplies, along with orders not to return. He stood defiantly on the bridge, refusing to walk away. The guards warned him twice, informing him of the fatal consequences of his choice to stay. There was no third warning. A hand signal from the gate guard was followed by the young protestor's head being whipped back, which was followed by the sound of the rifle shot. I'm pretty sure the shooter was up on one of the hotel towers on Little Nahant, but I sure as ghost couldn't see him.

I've spent most of the morning sneaking around and hiding as best I can. The guard presence at the station has doubled since I arrived, and the patrols seem to be on the lookout for something. Might be the norm, but I've heard them asking some locals whether they'd seen anything out of the ordinary. I was thinking I could find a quiet corner to hide here, but no such luck. I did notice the QZ border out on the water is close. I saw patrol boats get within half a klick. I even had their icon on my link for a half second or so when I was out near the end of the island.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 2076 01:12

Call me stupid if you want, but at least I tried to get out of this hellhole. Late last night I snagged a small boat and some scuba diving gear to make a turtle run for the border. I was about two hundred meters out when I noticed buoys out in the water. I could tell they weren't the regular navigational buoys by the shape and the extra electronics. I figured they were security buoys and slipped behind the boat. It turned out to be a life saving move. When I came within one hundred meters of a pair of buoys I was trying to split, they both sprouted turrets and opened fire. There was no warning, no message—just autofire tearing up the boat. I dove straight down like there was no tomorrow. I was slowing my descent and trying to equalize when all of a sudden the pressure of the water around me shot up. The next thing I know I'm moving faster than I could ever possibly swim on my own, and then I violently slide along up the "beach" (basically gravelly mud), slam into a rock, and see this swirling funnel of water hovering at the water's edge. Fucking spirit!

I could hear a KE patrol running my way, so I didn't have a conversation with this spirit like D.C. did. I started running up the beach, away from the pawns, and the damn spirit followed me. It hovered at the edge of the water and paralleled me, obviously keeping me from returning to the water. I was about to cut inland when the spirit suddenly flashed down the beach, pulling water in a massive wave behind it. I looked over and saw one of the pawns standing at the edge of the surf scanning across the water with his flashlight as the spirit and the wave slammed into him.

Whatever else happened, I missed it. I heard gunfire and gargling screams, but that all quickly faded into the background as I ran. I spent most of the rest of the night moving and keeping out of sight. They put up drone patrols to find me, and I spotted them just before I found something interesting on Nahant.

I was down near the southeastern tip of the island, hiding under an overhang, when I found a door. I figured it was some kind of old bunker entrance from one of the World Wars, but more importantly, it was a way to hide from the drones about to find me. I was wrong about the old bunker. The door led to an underground facility that obviously hadn't been used in a while. I took some time to explore and eventually ran into a part of the facility that was still in use. I could hear muted talking on the opposite side of a door. I didn't delve any deeper. Instead I found this cozy little niche to hide in and get this written.

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2076 13:30

The rest of that facility is a research lab for an Ares subsidiary, UnlimiTech. I spotted a bunch of corp logos before I had to bail. I must have tripped an alarm or something, because they were on me before I got very far. Serious gear on their security forces, too. Full body armor and Alphas all around. They didn't trail me out of the place, but once I was topside I was on the run from the KE patrols all night.

By the time daybreak came, I knew I wasn't going to be safe anywhere on the island. So I went with an escape plan D.C. and I had talked about to get clear of the QZ. After my last attempt, I knew a water escape wouldn't get me safely away, but it at least got me off Nahant. I hit the harbor, cut every mooring line I could find, and then picked a random boat to hop on. I rode the current out but fired up the boat's mooring motors to get a little extra speed on the sly. It was a good twenty minutes before I heard someone boarding. I quietly killed my unwanted passengers and then fired up the main engines and cruised back to the shores of hell.

I took the boat up the Pines River and got a good look at Point of Pines. The little peninsula's two roads were blocked off, although one was on a bridge. I was able to pass beneath it. No one shot at me there, but a couple of yahoos from one of the taller buildings near the middle of the community did once I was out on the river. The area also had quite a few house fires burning. Not sure if that's from fighting or a way to purge the sickness. Maybe neither, maybe both. I know when I'm not welcome, so I didn't stop by to ask.

I'm going to check out the Revere Beach MegaResort. D.C. mentioned he had gotten a lot of messages from people there when the grid came back up. I'm hoping they have some safe little spots where I can get a good night's rest. The two-kilometer-long superstructure should have plenty of places to crash for a night.

ELIZA SCIRATHIAN, ELF, 32 YEARS OLD

"Sure I have time for a nosy reporter-type. We're fighting a war with an enemy that we don't even know what they look like. Maybe if we had a mage or something, they could do some out-of-body mojo and get a look. But we don't. And now we're down to Evelyn in charge, and she's only in charge because she was screwing Barrett and privy to his plans. I saw where his plans got us, and I'm sure we aren't far behind if we keep down the same path. Personally, I'm trying to figure out how I can get some horns to join the Devils, or hit the road. You need an attractive traveling companion?"

DONALD "DUCK" HERZBERG, HUMAN, 23 YEARS OLD

"The Unseen are all scare. Barrett probably got jumped because he was a cocky asshole with a god complex. Evelyn at least has some sense. She's looking at other options and at least considering what other people are saying. Others are looking to hit the road, but I'm happy here. I used to work here, and I know the place like the back of my hand. If they'd just let me help, I'm sure I'd be helpful. Any chance you could talk to Evelyn and mention I'd make a good scout? I got a couple rounds for that Predator if you would."

BRETT "BOOKWORM" BOZEMAN, TROLL, 19 YEARS OLD

"I'm not a fan of fighting. Sure, I can smash heads and take hits, but it's pointless. We're outnumbered no matter who we fight. If we want to do anything, we need to use tactics. When you're outnumbered, you do like Leonidas. Find a chokepoint, draw them in, and kill as many of them as you can before you go down."

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2076 20:05

Revere Beach MegaResort used to be *the* place to stay in Boston during any season. That ended a few weeks ago. Almost two kilometers long, a block wide, and going from four stories on the ends to fifty stories at the center has made this place an icon and an eyesore. According to the brochure I found, it has eighteen swimming pools, three waterparks, nine restaurants, nine full-sim arcades, four bowling alleys, and all sorts of stuff that would be great for a nice recreational vacation. Now that this place is inside a quarantine, those places have a different value. The pools are a water supply, restaurants are looted for food, the sim arcades are prime real estate for those wishing to escape the QZ for a little while, and the bowling alleys have had their food looted and the pins and balls snagged for weapons.

The place is controlled by four distinct groups, though one of them is on the verge of collapse. The north end is under the watch of the PPR, Pine Point Refugees, while the near north side and all the floors above twenty-seven are controlled by the Unseen. The near south and the central waterpark are controlled by the Shamblers, and the south end is currently held by the Horned Devils.

The PPR are currently on the verge of falling apart since their leader was lost during an attack into Unseen territory. They are a group of people who were kicked out of Pine Point for either refusing to follow the rules or being suspected of infection. Quite a few of them seem to have overcome the infection and come through it okay. They were down and out for a few days with serious headaches, but they've recovered enough to join the rest of the group. Actually, according to their new interim leader, a woman named Evelyn Grey, they have had to kick a few people out who were becoming increasingly violent as the infection progressed.

Unless Grey can rally the group behind her and convince them to shore up their own spot and forget trying to take territory from the Unseen, they'll be doomed.

I'm not the interviewer D.C. was, but I got a few people to tell me their thoughts. [link]

The Unseen are a dangerous lot. Their name is literal. No one in the PPR has seen them and survived to tell the tale, but they know Unseen territory based on where they've lost excursion parties and where the bodies have been left to be found. From what I've gathered the Unseen haven't pushed into anyone else's territory, simply laid claim to their own. They leave the bodies of some of those they kill at what they consider the edge of their territory. Other bodies disappear, and there's a rumor that the Unseen are ghouls. But since no one has seen them, no one knows.

The shamblers aren't an organized group. In fact they aren't really a group at all. They're sufferers of the infection that have become mentally damaged. They shamble around the area they "control." The Horned Devils told me they kill them on site and leave the bodies. The border between the shamblers territory and the Horned Devils is a stinking pit of rotting corpses. A Horned Devils lieutenant, Mephisto, thinks there might be more than meets the eye with the shamblers because they haven't died of starvation or wandered outside, so some level of consciousness and control is there.

As for the Horned Devils, they're an all-metahuman go-gang that used to operate out of South Boston and run the 1A and 128, but when the lockdown went up they ducked into the MegaResort and haven't hit the road again. They get their name from the fact that they all have horns—whether they are trolls or have implants, every member of the gang has horns of some kind on their head, and quite a few are rather unique. Lucifer, their leader, is a dwarf with a pair of jet-black bull horns that sweep back from his forehead over his head. According to the gang's rumor mill, he also has a cyberskull and neck implants to allow him to ram and gore people with the horns.

On their end of the resort, they are pretty stable and actually spend more time keeping others out than dealing with the shamblers. They warned me that the shamblers stop shambling as soon as they spot anyone that isn't one of them and get vicious. I convinced a couple

of HDs to give me the front-line view, and it paid off in spades. First, they're right—the things come on like a rabid wolverine once they spot you. Second, and more important to anyone who wants to look at what's going on here in depth, is the fact that the one shambler that attacked us was a member of the PPR only a few days before. I saw a picture of him standing next to the former leader of the PPR just before they went to their deaths at the hands of the Unseen. I tried to tell my hosts and then promptly got ejected for letting them know I had been over at the north end. Since it's not my place to cure stupid, I just headed out.

Due to the timing of my untimely expulsion, I've made myself comfortable in the bathroom of the BeanTown Motel. It's cramped, but thanks to a pair of mattresses and box springs, it's comfy and secure.

Lately the power has been back on at night, and the nights have changed. At first it seemed everyone was relieved that the power took away the darkness and made the night easier to face. From what I've gathered on the grid, there were actually places that started throwing parties and celebrating. But the celebrations didn't last.

Now the nights sound like a warzone. Explosions and gunfire pop off at all hours. The days have their share as well, but the nights are when the real fighting goes on. It's leaving me with a rough dilemma. Do I travel by day and risk being seen from far off, or do I travel by night and risk walking into a warzone? I'm going to try for some sleep tonight and give the daytime a try tomorrow.

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2076 23:55

To answer my own question, they both suck. Then again that could just be where I walked today. The Revere region, as well as Winthrop and Cottage Hill, are all to be avoided, but Revere is definitely the worst of the three. I read that the kid passed through this area on his way north and figured if he could do it, I'm not going to have a problem. Wrong. D.C. passed through West Revere and talked about shops getting boarded up and then had some trouble up north at the Sheraton. I wanted to see what he was talking about so I cut across the marshland near East Revere and came at the place from a different angle.

First thing I noticed were the vehicle patrols. I had to duck for cover three times as vehicles came cruising the streets. Two were electric and I almost didn't hear them, but the third was a multi-fuel stepvan. At the time I thought maybe the Sheraton crew had expanded their operations, but that was not the case.

The Four Points Sheraton was still operating from behind their wall, and it looked like they had gained some extra resources. They were now flying about a dozen drones in the air overhead. They're the same kind of drones the QZ secforce is using, but it looked to me like they'd repaired some broken ones and got them flying again. They must be trading with a group near the border that's scavenging those.

As for the patrols, I saw them turn out on the street outside the Sheraton where they were quickly fired on by both the gate guards and one of the drones. They turned off the road before they took any serious damage, while the other car avoided that street and the van made a stop about a block away. A minute or so later, I saw a half-dozen people charge the front wall. The drones came at them in force, but not before the little mob had managed to pull both of the guards down off the wall and tear them apart. The drones got five of the six psychos. The last one was gone when the dust settled, along with the gate guard's rifles.

Revere is controlled by a large group of very ordinary-looking folks. Not a gang, not a military, nothing particularly unifying about any of them except the fact that they are all working together to lead hundreds of whacked-out "people." They get the quotes because they are psychotic and animalistic in their behavior but otherwise very normal-looking once you get past the blood-soaked clothes. They don't go after each other and they don't attack the norms, but they all have strange twitches and shifts to their movement. Locals have taken to calling them "ragers."

The norms hold the freaks in a fenced-in area outside a school. It looks like they load them into those stepvans and then drop them off wherever they need them to attack. After seeing one attack on their gate, I can't imagine how the Sheraton group has survived this long, especially if these guys dropped off an attack at night.

The freaks actually reminded me of the shamblers back at the MegaResort in certain respects. Something about the way they move when they're in the pen and then the way they bolted toward the gate at the Sheraton. Speaking of similar movements, the group that ran after me on the Nahant bridge moved like that, too. I'm sure part of the "infection" recovery involves being like that.

After watching for a few hours, I went to take a look around the rest of the town to see what the other people in the area were living like. What I found is that they weren't. I moved all over and obviously stayed too long. I ended up walking right into a norm taking a piss outside his patrol car. Shirt and tie neatly pressed, Horizon pin on the lapel, perfectly combed hair, and pissing a stream of red iridescence. I got all that in the split second between draw and fire but after his brain was a fine spray on the wall I did take a closer look, but not too close.

The piss and the grey matter on the wall both had an iridescent sheen to them. It reminded me of the dragon that hit Fenway and the rain that fell from it. I didn't have a lot of investigation time but under close-up vision mag, I'm positive the strange iridescent coloration was caused by nanites, and the red was blood. Whatever was going on inside that guy's body, he wasn't a specimen of health.

I snagged the car but only managed to take it a few blocks before I had control usurped by remote operation. I was expecting something like that and bailed when it slowed to take a turn and bring me back to norm

base. I left Revere in the dust but had limited directional options thanks to where I got out and headed down south into Winthrop from there.

Bad day, phase two. Winthrop has become the private score-settling warzone of four local gangs: the Rock Lobsters, the Dragonslayers, the Iron Wolves, and the Dead Poets. The local residents were all chased out or killed, I'm hoping the former but expect the latter. Or I could be totally wrong, and they could have all been sold to the freaks in Revere. The four gangs seem to fight daily and nightly skirmishes that look a lot like urban brawl matches.

The Rock Lobsters' colors are red and black, the gang consists of mostly Amerind orks and humans, and they're led by a Lobster shaman, according to my sources. They control the turf northeast of 145 and spend most of their time near the water.

The Dragonslayers' colors are green and black, the gang consists of mostly elves and dwarfs of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh descent, and they're led by a wanted terrorist from Tír na nÓg. They have a serious dislike for three groups in Boston: the Knights of the Red Branch, NeoNET, and the Knights of Rage. Notice a pattern? They control the territory in the northwest corner of Winthrop, including the local hospital. They cut off an avenue of attack by demolishing the bridge to Orient Heights. A fact I learned by trying to get out of this insanity via that route.

The Iron Wolves' colors are grey, black, silver, and white. The gang is small by comparison to the others, but they all have cyber, skill on a bike, and an uncanny ability to fight as a group, like a pack of wolves. They control the largest section of turf down on the southwest quarter of Winthrop but rule over mostly empty houses. They have a lot of places to loot, and so they're well-supplied.

The Dead Poets don't wear specific colors. Instead they adhere to a strict dress code of khaki pants with sweater vests or full sweaters, dress shorts, and tie. There are few things more unnerving than facing down a man dressed like a college professor but wielding an assault rifle like a pro. They hold the southeast section of Winthrop right up to the neck of land leading south to Cottage Hill.

All four gangs fight over the central areas of Winthrop but leave others outside the neighborhood alone. The area gets two supply drops each week, so those times are always interesting. A number of residents of Winthrop now live down in Cottage Hill, where a team of runners has set up a little enclave and seems to be working on gathering displaced locals under a banner of "keep your fucking distance." Luckily for me, I'm a likable guy. That, and I have a lot of info about what's going on around Boston so people haven't minded having me around. I did a few interviews around Cottage Hill in memory of the kid. Thanks, D.C. [link]

I'd gotten the impression I could probably stick around from most of the people here, but the team's "negotiation specialist" (read: face) is obviously not keen on me being around as competition. I've felt the tension the entire time I've been here, and I'd rather avoid the drama in my life. I need to head out in the morning and get back on the road. The kid would want it that way, and there's still more to see.

TUESDAY, JUNE 23, 2076 21:49

I left Cottage Hill near daybreak and boarded a ferry running over to Logan International. Just before I left, they gave me a warning that Logan's run by a tough nut and to be careful. People have gone there a lot, and no one has ever come back. Seeing as this whole thing's been less than two weeks, I wasn't terribly concerned.

They were right about the leader. Colonel Tyler Bosco is a tough nut, but he has the military-precision thing down and controls Logan with one iron fist and one outstretched hand. He welcomes anyone who wants to come but requires them to join his military, entering basic training on the second day after being well treated and well fed on the first. Anyone who wants to leave is allowed, but his XO (and son), Captain Alex Bosco, told me that fewer than a dozen of the three-thousand-plus refugees they've taken in have done so.

With the way they treat people on the day they arrive, I'm not too surprised. I hadn't eaten that well since the QZ started, and everyone was welcoming. I was honest up front and told them I'd likely be gone before noon, but I was still interested in seeing the place. The Captain and I negotiated a deal. I offered a copy of the journal so far, and he gave me a decent tour.

The whole airport has been turned into a military base, complete with medical facilities, training grounds, barracks, and a well-supplied depot. The tower provides an excellent 360-degree view of not just the base but most of the nearby areas, the Harbor, and the Hub. I was allowed to see the outside of the medical facilities, and Captain Bosco said they didn't have a serious infection issue, but their training led to a lot of injuries and they minimized other infection risk by maintaining tight restrictions on who was allowed in and out.

The training grounds were quite a sight. It looked like everyone was on them training in some form. Colonel Bosco has quite a force. I'm not sure how the QZ secforce is looking at his actions, but a force this large could easily punch a hole in the quarantine. The group is getting supply drops so the quarantine forces must not be that worried, but I don't know how much of what's going on inside the QZ the secforce knows.

The barracks, built inside the hangars, were neat and orderly with everyone but the night watch out training. They actually built a nice tiered structure inside that quadrupled the bed space in each hangar. A few planes have been refitted to be officer's quarters, including a semi-ballistic being used as Colonel Bosco's private headquarters.

ADRIANA WALSH, HUMAN, 32 YEARS OLD

"I just wish they'd tell us more. I know that keeping the populace in the dark is meant to prevent panic, but I think we're well beyond that now. At least tell us whether we need to start living in here as if we're never getting out or if there's a timeline in place. I think if we're here for the long haul we can make it. Boston's seen a lot of tough times. We're tough people. There's enough corporate presence here that they can just work together and start to organize. Maybe make the QZ into another kind of MDC. They all seemed to get along well enough to set up the new grids, so why not work together in here? Guess we'll see. For now I'll just be happy for Sakuri and her crew and do my best to help out."

DR. CADEN MENGARELLI, ELF, 41 YEARS OLD

"I started out trying to help with the outbreak, but we kept getting contradictory information from the NEMAQSF. Their encephalitis claims are wrong. I treated over a hundred cases myself that had no sign of cranial swelling. And the quarantine protocols they sent in had weird instructions, like minimal electronics usage, no MRIs, no nanotherapy. It was really strange stuff, and it tied our hands on treatment. Then when the violence started, I was done. I came here last week after my house got ransacked by the Rock Lobsters. Sakuri has me running a clinic with her team's shaman, Mako. He's not the best healer, being a Shark shaman and all, but every little bit helps. I overheard them talking about doing a little contract work soon to get out and stretch their legs. Not sure how I feel about that. It's their lives, but they got us all here and we thought they'd be around to keep us safe and ordered. They've put some good people in charge of the important stuff, myself being on that list. I'll just do my best to keep us healthy."

MARTIN FELDRAKE, HUMAN, 14 YEARS OLD

"I'll be joining Sakuri's crew soon. I already scavenged myself a nice Predator II, a decent H&K SMG, and an M-22 that just needs a little work. Once I get some ammo, I'll get some practice in. I know I've already got skills. I was ranked eighth in the world for Miracle Shooter last year, and this year I was headed for the Worlds when this shit happened. It's fate. I'm better off using my skills in the shadows. And don't give me the "you're only a kid" speech. I'm plenty old enough to shoot a gun and fast enough to beat any old timer who ain't wired to the gills. Wanna try me? No, didn't think so. I've seen the change, too. My sister caught the ceph. She was only seven. After the headaches, the spasms, and the babbling, she came through talking like a base-model GridGuide system. All monotone and stuff. And she started talking to other ceph victims about stuff that's way over the head of a seven-year-old. She came here with me but then ran away on the second night. We had to lie to get her in here anyway, so I didn't chase her. I know, makes me cold, but that's what you have to be in the shadows. Ice cold. Frosty. Totally chill. Maybe that can be my streetname—Iceman. Whatcha think?"

DORIAN BLACKMOON, ORK, 7 YEARS OLD

"I'm just here because mom told me to be. I followed her. I think the runners are scary, but the monsters are scarier. They came from the dragon rain, you know. That glittery rain made everyone it landed on sick. Some of them got sick real quick. Other people it took awhile. I saw it. And people who took the rain in their houses on their clothes, they all got sick in there. My mom and I were home. We was watching out the window. It was bad. I don't like the dragon rain. I liked Damon. He was nice when he came here. But others chased him off. They were afraid. He didn't look scary, but others said he was. Can I have my candy bar now?"

FLAKE, ELF, WOULDN'T SAY HER AGE

"Yeah, Damon came to town. He's been doing the whole wandering-monk thing. Kinda like you, but less nosy. I talked with him a lot since Sakuri didn't trust him and wanted my opinion. He said a lot of things and apologized for the actions of his dragon-kin but wouldn't give details as to what's going on. I don't think he actually knows. Warned us to stay away from Salem and MIT&T. Funny thing is, those are the two hottest spots to do corporate work right now. Catacombs are hot for the mob, KE is contracting all over the QZ, the Colonel out at Logan is contracting for work down south and up near Salem, and I've got word that the railyard, former stock exchange, and naval yard are really popular. I know Romeo doesn't like you much so Sakuri won't take you on, but there are plenty of crews around that would welcome a guy like you. Actually, Damon had a following. They kept their distance, and I think most of them stayed out of sight to not spook us, but I saw them join up with him on his way south. Maybe you can hook up with the Little D. That's what folks in Boston were calling him before the QZ. Not to his face but, well, I thought it was funny."

PRIVATE JENNIFER TINES, ORK, 19 YEARS OLD

"This is making the best of what's happened for me. I could have stayed down in the Rox and joined a gang, but instead me and a few of my friends headed here when we heard about it. There were twelve of us when we left. Five of us made it. Bigsy, I mean Lieutenant Bigstrom, was one of us. He saved our hoops out there, and when we told the story he got promoted into the officer corps. Haven't really talked to him much since then. He changed a lot. They give the officers a lot of responsibility. Hank—Private Torch—said Lt. Bigstrom actually didn't recognize him in his uniform when they saw each other again. Crazy what a uniform will do for someone. I think I might actually stay in the service once we're cleared of the quarantine. The Colonel said we probably could. We'd have to pass physicals and stuff, but with the training program here that shouldn't be a problem. So are you joining up? I think you'd make a great officer."

SPECIALIST ANDREW JONES, HUMAN, 20 YEARS OLD

"Ha, everybody used to call me A.J., too. Now I'm Specialist Jones, or Spec J to my team. I love it here. The training's tough, but it's already paid off. My team did a little scouting trip out to Maverick Square to check out the port across the river. It was a night op, and as we went to cross McClellan, a pair of ghouls charged us from Sumner tunnel. We didn't panic, executed perfect overlapping fields of fire, and unloaded on the freaks before they even cleared ten meters. They were tough bastards, though, and Lieutenant Search got a nasty slash and bite. Tore him open something wicked. Medic patched him up best he could, and we found a nice little hole for him to hide out in. Rest of us completed the mission. Medic wasn't expecting to find him alive when we got back, and if he was, we were expecting Infection. When we get back, Search is up on the roof of the building, silencer screwed on, popping heads off some shamblers a block down. Said the wound wasn't as bad as it looked. I say he's just one seriously tough son of a slitch. He's still clear to this day. No HMHVV and hardly any scarring. Someday I hope I'm that tough."

SERGEANT MATTHEW "KODIAK" NOEL, ORK, 39 YEARS OLD

"Moving on's the smart move. You're getting the real dirt now 'cause I think you got a head on your shoulders and, well, I need to tell somebody. Something's wrong here. Seriously wrong. Everyone seems brainwashed. The kids coming in get caught up in the training and uniforms and feeling of being safe and part of something. The officers all roll out of their 'training course' and act weird. They look at you and they know your name, but don't know you. Even if you were old friends, there's just something different about them, like they aren't themselves. I'd say brainwashing or something, but the course is only a week and they don't come out worn down like they were broken and then built back up. I spent some time in the Agency, I know what that's like. The NCOs all seem okay, but they're all trapped between the starry-eyed kids and the blank-stared officers. Take it however you want, but stay clear of this place and these people. Me included. 'Cause you never know when they'll be extending the 'officer training' to NCOs. Good luck, A.J. Hope to not see you around."

The depot was off-limits and only mentioned during the tour, but its location wasn't pointed out. I saw the entire place from the tower—no one place seemed to be guarded more than any other. I have a feeling it's located in the terminals or stored down in the underground tunnels beneath the airport. Bosco didn't mention those, but I know they're there from a run a few years back.

I wasn't able to meet Colonel Bosco, but I got a few comments before I left, which was at noon as expected. [link]

I left through an access hatch down to the I-90 tunnel and walked the tunnel to South Boston. The tunnel had quite a few abandoned and smoldering cars, and it stank of burnt chemicals. But I wanted to explore. Luckily, what I call exploring involves a lot of sneaking around because that section of tunnel has a small pack of ghouls living in it. They're one ghoul less now, but I'm a full clip lighter. Tough hoop, little slitches.

As for South Boston, I'll let the locals tell their story. I met a kid who reminded me a lot of D.C.. He's been working on a piece about what's going on, and I traded him my piece for a synopsis of his so far. He got more gross data but I got a solid look at effects of the infection. South Boston's unique culture paints a vivid picture. [link]

After what I've seen in Revere and the MegaResort, I believe this guy. Strange behaviors going on all around, but the weirdoes seem to be banding together. Other than that little piece the kid also warned me that something's been going down near Columbus Park and the train depot. Quite a bit of fighting has gone on there and he said a lot of electronics malfunction in the area. His warning almost got me headed in that direction but he had intrigued me more with a mention of Castle Island and Fort Independence, so I headed that way.

A lot of ships were stuck in the harbor when the lockdown went into effect. A dozen ship captains got together and docked around the shipping yards near Fort Independence. Their crews secured the yards and the fort and then started inviting other ships to dock as well. When the power went out in the beginning, this area

SEAN "HAYMAKER" MCCARTHY, HUMAN, 36 YEARS OLD

"South Boston's been my home since three days after I was born. I came home from Mass Gen and haven't left since. Of course that's not literal, but in my thirty-six years of life I can count on my fingers and toes the number of nights I've spent outside South Boston. Southies just don't leave.

"And now, under quarantine, I've even less of a reason to wander, but me and home's changing right before my eyes. Where once just hearing the familiar Southie tongue swagger was enough to make any Southie feel at home, we now mistrust our neighbors as if they didn't grow up right alongside us. South Boston's been affected by this infection in ways that I don't think anyone but a Southie could really understand.

"But the quarantine, actually the infection, is changing the place. Something has happened to make folks not remember who they are. It's not an amnesia, but more of a loss of character. We have had our fair share of 'Encephalitis Rage,' as da QZ news calls it, and lost quite a few good folks. Something's different. Something's wrong.

"I've done me digging, made me connections, and followed the trail of breadcrumbs back to Fenway. There are a lot of Sox fans in South Boston, but not a lot who can afford tickets to a game. Most watched via tridcast or through the VR simulcast, but a select few would scrape and save for a ticket here and there, or win one in a contest. Those folks seem to be the link here.

I've managed to connect almost all the South Boston infection victims back to someone who was at the game on the 15th. All but one of those who were present at the game suffered from the Encephalitis Rage. Others who were close to them—family, friends, medical care specialists who treated them—have all been through the encephalitis symptoms. Most have recovered, some suffered the rage, a few are still having troubles, but all of them seem "different."

I'm not sure quite how to state it, as it's different for all of them, but something about them just ain't right. They don't act the same, or talk the same, some have become reclusive, others overly inquisitive, a few have become unhygienic, others overly picky about an appearance they didn't worry about before.

I've spoken to others who have noticed the same thing. We're coordinating our observations. It may not be as easy in other places but be aware and take this as a warning. The encephalitis is a cover for something else. Dunno what, but something."

was lit by the onboard power of the ships and thus drew a lot of attention. Instead of fighting off every frightened traveler, they opened their arms and let them in under the agreement that everyone had to pitch in on whatever the captains required.

It was a remarkable amount of forethought on the part of the captains. Everyone there says the captains knew it was going to be serious as soon as they blacked out the town and cut off communications. Personally, I figure they thought that if they were wrong it was no big deal to just send everyone away and have lots of thankful souls around. The group even managed to push the Hub cordon off the docks. They didn't fight KE, they just helped them push the cordon perimeter in a bit.

Since they all joined up together, the captains have scavenged the entire docks. Their ships have quite a stockpile of odds, ends, necessities, and luxuries. They do a brisk trade with anyone who wants and they have one of the most popular entertainment venues in the QZ, the Fort Independence Arena.

They've set up the fort like a gladiatorial arena and have put on fights most nights. They pay both the winner and the loser in their arena matches. They're also rumored to pay solid money for anyone bringing in animals to fight. They don't stage matches to the death because they don't want to lose fighters or animals, though some fatalities happen, especially with the animal fights. It's hard to get an angry tiger to understand the phrase "I surrender."

They offer rooms to stay in or use for other activities, and they're usually free. If the place is busy you might wind up bunking with a stranger, but again, it's free. You can't be picky. There are places you can pay to stay in, and from what I understand they tend to be pricey and their rates can change by the minute.

The area has a Catacombs entrance within the walls but not too many people here are using it, except maybe to travel here or to come up for some trading.

I've got a nice cozy corner of a Maersk freight container for the night, and I'm going to use it now.

WED., JUNE 24, 2076 19:45

It's an early night tonight thanks to the new rules. No power after 20:00. The QZ secforce issued an announcement with the morning drops that power would be limited in the evenings to allow the citizens to settle in for the night. I'm sure they're just trying to cut down on the night fighting, since it has gotten really bad lately.

After that message this morning I spent a little time on the Grid and saw some local talk of hackers trying to find a way out of the Hub Grid. A bunch tried to go after one of the Big Ten and got hammered. Hackers all over the QZ were chatting about it.

JASON MILES, HUMAN, 24 YEARS OLD

"Most of my neighbors moved because being this close to the wall either made them nervous or made them sad. They said it was like being in a prison and watching the walls get slowly built around you. They couldn't handle knowing they were trapped inside. I'm not a revolutionary or a soldier and I couldn't fight my way out of a wet paper bag, but I can definitely run through a gap if it's clear. I'm just waiting for the crack."

ANGEL DELACRUZ, HUMAN, 37 YEARS OLD

"I've lived through a lot, and what I've seen around here are a whole lot of people who haven't. I've thought about taking the easy way out before. This was twenty years ago, when I was a dumb kid who hadn't faced the world yet. I was pregnant, alone, and not sure where my next meal was coming from. I made it through that, and a lot more since. My daughter just started her second year at Texas A&M&T, on a full scholarship. Let's be straight, plenty of my neighbors have killed themselves. I'm not frosty with that plan. My daughter would never understand. Mommy's a fighter, and she's gonna know that if I went down in here, I went down swinging."

SERACH CASEEL, ELF, 46 YEARS OLD

"It was the screamers. The neighbors couldn't take all the people who would come to the wall and wail to let them out. I just got some earplugs or tuned it out. People deal with these things in their own way. I think the other part was the number of screamers who went hoarse and then charged the wall with their bodies instead of their words. Even I had a tough time sleeping through that. We moved out this far so my wife and I wouldn't hear the gunshots."

TANNER SMOLEN, HUMAN, 19 YEARS OLD

"I stuck it out because I didn't have anywhere else to go. Yeah, I could move and take up some space in someone else's squat or kick somebody out, but this is my home. Been here all my life. If my mom ever makes it back from downtown, this is where she'll look for me. Hate for her to have to search for me or get worried. You said you travel around, right? You been downtown yet? Maybe if you're headed that way I can give you a picture of my mom. If you see her you can tell her I'm okay and waiting at home. Would you mind?"

A lot of rumors flying around about a group of technomancers who claim to have a way to connect our grid to the outside through what they call a "resonance realm." No clue what that is, but I'm sure the secforce has that covered just like they're covering the astral. I don't actually know anything about astral space, but it was the subject of more of my reading today since it linked to some other talk about ways of getting info out of the QZ. There were some good ideas, but most people seemed unwilling to try since they require large amounts of risk and possible one-way trips to places no one wants to go. I got a lead, though. The kid might just go public.

For my travels today I went across the water again, landed at Ares Victory Park, and decided I'd make a little trip in honor of D.C. over to Ashmont and see what had become of his neighborhood. I don't think he would recognize it. The Rox seems to have exploded outward all over the southern neighborhoods of Boston. Locals that D.C. said were galvanized against assault have joined up with various gangs for protection.

I walked the streets from Victory Park across to Jamaica Plains, as far south as Hyde Park and Milton, and then back to I-93, the eastern border south of Neponset. I wandered all over these places just looking for something that might be a bastion of civilization but found nothing. The gangs rule the area.

I saw Ancients that didn't have pointy ears, Cutters patrolling a street like a mob, Roxx Hounds who couldn't be more than twelve years old, Night Stalkers walking the streets by day, and a dozen other gangs whose members just didn't fit the normal bill but had been pulled in or joined just to have someone to watch their backs.

The closest to civilized I got was a run-in with some of Don O'Rilley's soldatos, who happened to be wearing suits while they pounded in the heads of a pair of 86ers. I tried to talk to them and get a little time with the Don, but they took a potshot at me that expressed their opinion of that idea loud and clear. This area has definitely fallen even further from civilization. I didn't even think that was possible.

As for the neighborhoods near the wall around here, most are abandoned. I talked to a few folks who stayed behind, and they gave me stories of their neighbors and why they left, if they left. [link]

I took the picture from the kid. I think he was a little slow, but he was a monster. Cleanly over two meters and probably massing in around a hundred sixty kilos, mostly muscle from the looks. At first I thought he was a pretty ork. Anyway, back to the cordon talk.

There's still plenty of good supplies to scavenge in the area. A lot of the people who left didn't take much, and the ones who went with the final solution left just about everything behind. There were quite a few people who took a solo run at the wall who made sure to light their homes on fire before they left, maybe as an attempted distraction. With Boston Fire, Inc. none too responsive these days, this usually meant a few houses and often an entire block or more being charred

to cinder along with all the supplies that might have been inside. I didn't record the story, but one of the locals in the area mentioned that one of the block fires was started by a drone firing grenades at the houses on the block.

I'm taking a break and saving the juice on this link. We'll see if the nighttime power limitations have an effect on fighting tonight. I hope they do. I could use a good night's sleep.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2076 09:40

It's been a few days since I made my last recording, and as you might have guessed, that means it's been an interesting time. The little nook of safety I found turned out to be right in the path of a group looking to make a run at the border. I watched it go down, and I'm still not exactly sure what happened. The whole group—I counted twenty-seven of 'em—managed to creep up to I-93, right to the edge of the fog, without setting off an alarm. They'd woken me up by moving through the house I was hiding in and talking briefly. After they left I followed, slipped into a nice four-story condoplex, and got a good view. I could see them creep up, most of them belly-crawling like professional soldiers, and line up along the edge. There was a series of explosions near the border, maybe a kilometer south. When I looked back from the distraction, the whole group was disappearing into the fog on the highway, moving in a crouched trot. I switched to thermal optics to watch the rest and, well, it wasn't pretty.

I saw two shapes coalesce from nothing behind the group. The forms were bulky and humanoid but way off temperature, and right away I knew the group was doomed. Four of the slowest members were dead without making a sound, but someone turned to look back and saw the two spirits—that's what they had to be—and opened fire. Whatever he was shooting was silenced, but it was loud enough to alert the rest of the group. Most of them picked up their pace and left the rear guard to do their job. It didn't matter. Another few seconds left more dead. Then the drones opened fire. They must have had thermal dampening, because they were practically invisible except for the heat of the muzzle flashes and trail of the tracer rounds they spat out to tear up the group of would-be escapees. It was ugly, brutal, and over in seconds. The drones, barrels hot from firing, faded back into the fog like it was nothing.

I took up a new spot in the building and in the morning as I left I only briefly glanced out the way I had watched. I was only planning to make a cursory glance at the carnage, but I noticed that something was off. I stopped to take another look—there was nothing. No bodies, no blood. I even zoomed in and didn't see a single shell casing. Nothing to show that twenty-seven people, sick of being trapped inside and taking a chance at freedom, died there the night before.

I'd gotten a few messages mentioning how the Rox was spreading, so I headed south to see for myself. I wasn't surprised to see that it hadn't managed to penetrate the walls of NeoNET's Blue Hills Complex between West Quincy and Scott's Woods. I was expecting the place to look better, though. It looks like it's been attacked repeatedly. The grounds outside the fences have rotting bodies everywhere. I kept my distance, since I got the feeling they weren't very friendly (openly displayed corpses have that effect). The compound runs right down to I-93, the edge of the QZ, but from a distance it looked like NeoNET's people were keeping clear of that southern section of the facility. Just like D.C. found up north.

I swung a little wide north, but once I got past NeoNET's compound I cut south again and followed the highways. Out around I-90 I almost thought I had walked out of the QZ. It seemed like people in the Newton neighborhoods are banding together in the quarantine. The sick were all handled at the hospital and, according to the locals, released once the symptoms subsided. Now from what else I've gathered I'm not sure that's a good thing, but this whole area is relatively intact and seems to be surviving this thing. KE patrols roll through the neighborhoods regularly and have established their own quarantine security by keeping large groups from other areas out and thoroughly scrutinizing lone wanderers despite their friendly smile.

I wasn't welcome to stick around, but they were nice enough to drive me to the edge of their territory. I skirted I-90 until it ran into the towers near the Charles River by Cambridge and then climbed up and actually walked on the highway toward the Hub. Seemed safer than the shadowy streets below.

Past the towers, 90 was the border for both the Hub and Fenway cordons, and the road itself was used by KE for awhile until they pulled back to let the cordons combine. I had some ins with KE due to work I had done inside the cordon area, and they let me head in.

From up on the highway I could see small fires burning all over town, but there was a large plume of black smoke in the distance. With my minimal knowledge of Boston geography and the buildings blocking my line of sight, I couldn't pinpoint the smoke. But I guessed it was near Fenway.

I remembered reading what the kid wrote earlier, and I wasn't too keen on going near what sounded like a biohazard quarantine. The highway had enough height and distance that I could get a look without getting too close. The smoke was coming out of the top of the plastic bubble over the field at Fenway, and as I got closer it took on an unpleasantly familiar scent. Burning meat. I didn't see what kind of meat, but I have my guesses.

Past that, the BU campus didn't look like it had much activity, though I did spot the occasional denizen scurrying between buildings and shadowed alleys like rats. It was the lack of activity that lulled me. I walked right up to where the highway tucked underground at the edge

of the Hub and missed the figures standing back in the shadowed underground.

It was a quartet of Mama's Boyz who faux-politely invited me in. I considered resisting the invite. There were only four of them. I was tired, but my reflex systems don't care about that. I had a few good spots of cover, but a moment before I went for my gun I saw movement on the street over the tunnel and six of those twitchy, psychotic looking "encephalitis" victims were glaring down at me. I put my hands over my head and went quietly with Mama's Boyz while the group of psychos ran toward a way down.

They led me into the tunnel and then through a door into the service tunnels. I managed to track a few turns, but before long I was completely lost. All I could think as I got dragged deeper into the Catacombs was that I should have just learned from the kid and stayed away from the Hub.

The trip wasn't a total waste. I made a new contact in the Catacombs. His name's Tark. He got pinched by Mama's Boyz, too, but they were planning to gut him for leaving one of theirs to die on the streets. That was Wednesday. Today's Friday, so obviously we got clear.

Tark offered a tour of some of the highlights down here since I saved his life, and though I insisted we're even, he still wanted to play tour guide. Before I get too much into that, let me give the brief on the Catacombs for those not familiar with Boston.

The Catacombs are a massive subterranean network beneath the Boston Metroplex. They aren't just under the Hub. Before the quarantine they consisted of old subway tunnels, sewers, maintenance tunnels, basements, and even natural and dug-out caverns in the bedrock below the city. Now they've added in all the functioning subway and highway tunnels as well as some of the private corporate passages that have been exposed since the lockdown.

Before the quarantine there were some nice spots and good hideouts down here, but anyone going down still knew they were trading the dangers of corporate or private security for the risk of encountering devil rats, ghouls, or worse. Since the quarantine, and the wave of crazy that hit the Hub between the 15th and the 18th, a big chunk of the surviving, non-corporate population has gone subterranean.

The Catacombs are full of refugees from the city above. It started with trolls and dwarfs, who have a natural affinity for the dark places below the ground thanks to the way they see. With the trolls came orks who lived in the same neighborhoods, and with the dwarfs came humans looking to their stout kin for guidance in the dark. Elves came down as well, but most of them stay near the entrances and away from the deep places. Honestly, the place is like a strange sci-fi/fantasy/post-apocalypse crossover novel where metahumankind has been forced to live below the ground to survive the devastation of the surface.

I'd wondered where all the people had gone while I worked in the cordons and saw all the towers and neighborhoods empty or down to only a few holdouts boarded into their homes. I found them here. Thousands—possibly tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands—of people have moved underground to avoid the insanity that took hold of the surface.

Along with the locals, the Catacombs have a large non-local population. A lot of commuters from New York, Providence, Hartford, Portland, and other cities all over the NEMA were in the city when the lockdown went into effect and halted trains, planes, boats, and ground traffic leaving the city. A lot of these people were displaced, left to stay in hotels, motels, or shelters at first. When the violence started, the corps locked down their facilities. Some people have told me that even the corps weren't quick enough, and they've been fighting to take back the lower floors of their towers since this started. Whether that's true or not, the corps weren't welcoming of non-corporate citizens, leaving the UCASians and anyone else in town without the right corporate SIN to fend for themselves. They followed any local that would have them down into the Catacombs.

Don't get the wrong picture in your head of wall-to-wall people crammed into subway stations and tunnels under the city. That's far from the case. There are some places that are busy like that, such as the Black Bazaar, Uptown, and the Nub, but there are plenty of places down in the Catacombs that are sparse or even empty. Tark told me about the Deep and the Labyrinth. Though most of the empty places aren't really empty.

The mass of people pouring down here has displaced some of the long-time tenants who are not often social creatures. Along with the "encephalitis" epidemic, the population of the Catacombs is facing a rise in the number of HMHVV Infected. Some newly Infected have done it voluntarily, feeling the pinch of food, suffering the depression of being trapped, and seeing it as a way to survive. (No, I don't understand it either, but it worked in their brains.)

They've been well-fed so far, as the number of dead on the surface is plenty to feed the Kriegers, but the vampires are a different story. Their numbers have grown slightly. A few seem to have been accidents, but most have been intentional in order to bolster their numbers in defense of the incursion. They've been frequent targets down in the Catacombs by those who fear them. I'm on that list, but I'm okay generally with co-existing with them—as long as no one is trying to bite my neck.

The subway system and Catacombs extend outside the QZ, but the passages that lead out are well-guarded. It was a slight relief to see that they hadn't simply collapsed the tunnels, which made me feel like this quarantine might end someday. Even though it doesn't feel that

FURIOUS BELT (SERIOUSLY, HE SAID THAT'S HIS NAME), DWARF, 59 YEARS OLD

"I've seen it all. Ya know, I was in Chicago, too. This ain't bugs. It's aliens. They're stealing bodies. Infesting us with their minds and stealing our bodies. They landed in the Harbor. That's really what all this is about. The guvmint doesn't want to let them escape and get to other cities. If they take over all the world leaders and megacorporate CEOs, we're all in trouble. They already got Damian Knight. That's why Nick Aurelius "jumped" out of a plane and died "skydiving." It was the aliens. Now they have Boston, but they're trapped. We got them right where we want them."

TOMMY TALON, HUMAN, 45 YEARS OLD

"It was all a secret project to perfect dragon mind control. Not dragons controlling our minds, us controlling theirs. Think about it—the dragon attack over the city. The sudden issue with people's brains 'swelling.' They're swelling with power, is what they're doing. Eventually they'll all get together and be able to control the dragons. We won't have to worry about their Civil War when we can make them all dance like puppets. We will have our day!" (Note: I've heard of Tommy Talon. I can't say this wasn't the real one; description fits, but I've never met the real guy. I hope this isn't him.)

NO NAME, HUMAN, MAYBE 15 YEARS OLD

"She comes. She seeps into our minds. The corruption, the truth, the alternate intelligences. We fight our own children. Put them in cages, torture them, seek their base. We are the evil, the wrong, the enemy. They will crush our minds, steal our souls, crush our very beings. They are the reckoning!"

way on the surface. I've seen the cold stone of the walls through the fog. They're being built up and buildings being knocked down along the QZ border, and that seems awfully permanent.

Downtown was hell from early on, and most say it's still the same, but the surviving infection victims have gotten good at hiding and stalking. Tonight I should have a decent report on my first expedition into the heart of the Hub.

Just so everyone understands, I've been inside the cordon before. I did recovery ops for KE early on, trying to help people out, but it was all aboveground work. I knew about the Catacombs, but early on the entrances were locked up tight. Now that I have a guide, I might find some more survivors.

I did get some more interviews. A little humor never hurt anyone. [link]

Sorry, I was dropping names of places back there and not giving the rundown on the locales. D.C. would be disappointed. I don't have tons of time, but here goes.

THE BLACK BAZAAR

Imagine the dirtiest, seediest, loudest, and most dangerous shopping districts you've ever been to. Now take the worst qualities of all of them, put them in one place, and you've got the Black Bazaar. This place doesn't have a set location. It operates out of one area for a while and then—sometimes all of a sudden, sometimes a little more gradually—it moves to somewhere else entirely. The place is well-known for its consistently poor lighting, tight quarters, and random setup. Make sure you have a top-notch talker or some serious nuyen if you are looking for specific things. You'll need directions. If you're there to browse, good luck—folks down here aren't keen on strangers, and if you don't have an introduction you can expect everything to cost double or triple normal street rates.

These days the shopkeepers are contracting a lot more supply runs from runner teams. Sometimes it's to grab something as simple as medical supplies from a supply drop, other times it's to wipe out a gang and steal all their weapons. The quarantine has made

this place a key shopping center for not only the regular Catacombs denizens but a lot of the newcomers as well.

UPTOWN

Most folks think that the Catacombs are all underground, but in a few spots it takes up a little space above sea level. This is one of those places. Uptown is one of a handful of aboveground structures that are considered part of the Catacombs. This one was once a four-story office building near the river. When the towers along the river started getting built, the corporations often ignored sections of the ground and just built connections between towers over them. The buildings below became almost subterranean, even though they were above ground. Thanks to Mother Nature, this particular building suffered further thanks to the river pushing her bounds and flowing through most of the streets around it.

Someone had the bright idea of sealing the first floor, and with the access to the maintenance tunnels below, Uptown became an aboveground playground for the Catacombs. Now it houses a number of shops and living spaces as well as a small docking facility for shallow-water boats. Since the lockdown, this place and the few others like it have been stuffed with people who can't handle life underground.

There's a troll named Yaksha who operates an arms shop on the third floor. He's got a lot of the heavier stuff—in good condition even—and sells it for a premium. He also does repair work and takes trade in parts. He's not local, Amazonian by the accent, but he seems to care about the area. He asked me to Johnson two hooder ops for him and I took a little time to help him out. Good to have friends in lots of places. Even a friend who kept calling me Captain Kirk.

THE NUB

A play off the Hub, the Nub is the "center" of the Catacombs, located in the original South Station, beneath the current South Station. The place was a crowded mess before the lockdown and has become hazardously crowded since. If you need to get lost, this is the place to do it. Dress the part, and you can disappear into the masses.

Before the quarantine, this was a great place to shop and get all your day-to-day needs. It seems to still want to fill that role but with so many people down there now and the lack of supply for the demand, the shops don't have near enough to go around. Mama's Boyz were the primary force of order here before, the ones who usually kept the supplies coming, but now there's just too many people.

Lately Mama's Boyz have been trying to convince people to move out into the other tunnels and spread out from here. Most of the Catacombs are sparsely populated, especially with the addition of the regular subway tunnels since the lockdown. The biggest problem they've had is the natural fear most regular folks have of the dark places in the world. They're setting up little communities away from the Nub, but still close enough to get there in an hour or so, and moving groups of people out to them. Tark thinks they're up to something more, but Tark also doesn't trust them for his own personal reasons.

THE DEEP

Darkness as far as my augmented eyes could see—that was the Deep. The Deep is a hole that, according to the streets, comes out on the other side of the world. Find a Boston old-timer, though, and they'll tell you what it really was. The hole is part of a canceled desalinization plant that was being built under the city of Boston. It doesn't go all the way to the other side of the world; it only drops almost two kilometers. That's according to Tark's source, a former Boston civil engineer.

This place has been a dumping ground for anything anyone ever wanted lost for good. Rumors abound about people going down to scavenge, but I find it hard to believe someone would make a two-thousand-meter climb on a rung ladder for salvage.

Tark says there are waypoints on the way down, offshoot tunnels and maintenance areas, but it still seems like too much risk for not enough reward. One thing he was almost certain of was the presence of ghouls at the bottom. Rumors say that's where Mama lives, but rumors say a lot of things about Mama.

Tark's civil engineer said the project was never finished, and the hole has a series of tunnels at the bottom that dig out toward the ocean floor. The guy said that the project was near completion and startup when the economy took a dip back in the '30s and funding fell off.

THE LABYRINTH

This maze of tunnels below Boston Common has been the source of urban legends since its creation in the '40s when the Common was raised in order to better match the new ground level of the city. Since that time, it has become a hangout for teenagers, a stalking ground for serial killers, the supposed home of a killer crocodile, a dozen more ridiculous tales, and a part of the Catacombs.

Lately the biggest news has been the appearance of ragers in the Labyrinth. The Catacombs have been, luckily, virus free, but if one of those ragers gets into the regular Catacombs—well, that could be catastrophic. The entrances to the Catacombs from the Labyrinth are now monitored and guarded, but no one knows all of them. Tark says there are some groups forming in the Catacombs that may be willing to pay runners to hunt in the Labyrinth to keep the place safe.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2076 23:34

I may never travel or live the same way again, for several reasons. I've walked all over the QZ and right past

dozens of entrances for the local subway system but never bothered to head down and walk around. It's just not the way my brain thinks. I don't equate dark underground tunnels with safety. That view has definitely changed. As long as I can maintain a decent relationship with the folks down there, I should be able to use the Catacombs to move around. That's good because things in the QZ are changing and I don't think for the better. One thing at a time.

I'm not sure what I can say about the Hub. It sucks these days. The ground is a mess. Burned-out cars and storefronts, bodies in the street, and crazies still stalking about. But up in the sky it looks like business as usual. I could see people walking across the skywalks between corporate towers and aircraft making short hops to buildings that don't have skywalks. Tark and I saw a few KE Citymasters patrolling the streets—more like barreling along—as well as a couple of armored limos moving on the cleared streets between corporate offices. All the regular traffic, though, was gone. No commuters, no taxis, no trucks, nothing.

The corporate offices looked like they were still having trouble on the lower floors, and we saw a few fights going, but it wasn't corporate security forces. I've been at this game a while, and I'd bet cents to c-notes that it was runner teams doing the fighting. It makes sense—why endanger your own forces when you can hire expendable assets? The runners looked like they were focusing on hit-and-run tactics and trying to use the blind rage of the crazies to lead them into ambushes, but they never seemed to be able to draw them out of the buildings.

The worst-hit structures were definitely the NeoNET Towers. Didn't help that Tower 4 took the hit from the dragon, but that place has been in the crosshairs of the crazies ever since. NeoNET isn't alone though—every downtown building looked like it had been dealt its fair share of violence. We used the Catacombs to move around most of the time, but I convinced Tark to try some street-level movement just to see how hard it was these days. Most of the time, the streets and entrance areas of the buildings were okay to move through, but any deeper into most of the buildings and we ran into trouble. Including the most disturbing element of the day.

Tark knew a clinic that did a lot of street-level work and always had a decent supply of off-the-books pharmaceuticals and hardware. It was out of the way and located on the first subfloor of the Revere Building, which actually looked to be in better condition than most of its neighbors. Getting in was easy, since Tark's a wiz with electronics, and we didn't get our first clue that something was off until we slipped past the door marked, "Authorized Personnel Only: Electrocution Hazard" and into the clinic area hidden beyond. The power was on, which was not a shock, but we could hear the sounds of activity echoing through the barren and empty halls.

Curiosity (yes, I recall that it killed the cat) pulled Tark and I closer, and we took a peek into one of the operating rooms. Bad fragging plan. Opening the door broke the hermetic seal on it and unleashed the smell, which made Tark unleash his stomach. I gagged, but I managed to hold down my soystick lunch. Inside, the room was wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling blood! Literally. The whole room was covered in blood. A drone doc was operating on something on the table. It might have been a troll at one point, but I couldn't see well through my watering eyes. I was able to make out the monitors enough to see that whatever it was, it was still alive.

We backed out but just couldn't keep from continuing to look. It was like a bad accident that everyone stops to look at. The place had six surgical suites, all of which were in use and in similar condition. Past the suites were the recovery rooms where we saw more drone docs taking care of patients in the beds. They all looked like they had recent implant surgery, and the room was clean. When we finally got to the stock room, Tark got us in and we filled up our bags and headed for the door. We didn't make it. One of the surgical suites opened, and a Manservant drone pushed out the patient. The instant it spotted us, the whole place went dark, and we had to blast our way out through drones that seemed to come from everywhere.

We weren't keen on any more scavenging after that, but we kept looking around. We found out that DocWagon's Mass Gen is still operating, taking patients if they can reach the doors or fly in. Their node is up during the day and offers free medical advice for those who can't reach the hospital.

Tark pointed out that the Hub grid has a lot of activity thanks to the corp towers, and I reached out to a few of the folks I've met along the way. I didn't get word back right away but I couldn't sleep, so I strolled over to Uptown to see if my 'link could connect. The grid was still up, and I got a handful of messages from my earlier inquiries. None of them sounded good.

I got bad news from up in Marblehead that a runner team going after something in the town hall ended up killing most of the area's city leaders. KE is only worrying about themselves up there. The kid would be sad if he was still around; they were really his friends, not mine. With KE withdrawing support and no leadership to speak of, the people of Marblehead were looking for D.C. to see if he'd found anywhere good they could go. I sent back that D.C. passed and even sent more of the journal so they know he went down trying to help.

I'm getting the feeling that people are settling in for the long haul and not expecting help anytime soon. We've been cut off from the outside world for over two weeks now, so I can't blame them. I'll be heading out again tomorrow to get back to looking around.

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2076 20:45

What a day! It started early when Tark gave me a shake and said Mama's Boyz were in the area looking for

the both of us. I already had my bags packed, so all I left behind when we bolted was a little rat meat I'd set out for breakfast. No big loss. Since he was ducking the Boyz, Tark came with me for a long walk, and we popped out down by Endicott, south of the Rox. It was the last station before the border, so we figured it was best to just go topside.

Tark used the trip to test out a mapping soft where the user can mark entrances to the Catacombs to keep track of them. It links and updates with other trusted users, letting us split up to cover more ground for the database. Needless to say, we avoided two-legged trouble the whole way. I'm short a few rounds from some devil rats that thought we looked tasty, but that was all the excitement we had before noon. I should have known it was going too easy.

With a little help from Tark I stole a ride, though I'm thinking the former owner isn't really worried about his Runabout these days. Tark wanted to keep working on data entry for the mapsoft, so we parted ways. He's working his way back north and is going to start popping through side tunnels to find more entrances. I'm going to mark stations from up top. With a vehicle I figured my first spot to check out would be the Rox, then I could get away quickly if I needed to. Well, as quickly as a Runabout is anyway.

I made a short stop in Dedham to get it charged up. Last thing I wanted was for it to die out in the heart of the Rox. Like a B-rate trid it was quiet—too quiet. Almost on cue, I spotted a whole pack of "shamblers" strolling out of a house across the street. The quotes are because they weren't shambling, they were chatting with each other as they first walked out, and after that they settled into that shambling walk. It was like an actor slipping into a part. I wasn't sure what I had just seen, but I ducked down behind the car and pulled the charge plug as quietly as I could. When I peeked my head back up to see where the shamblers were, I was staring right into the eyes of one of them on the other side of the car. His tilted head straightened up, he looked right at me, and he said, "Weeked owesome cair." He must have expected me to be shocked longer, but the wires laid over my nervous system didn't do shock as well as they did draw-and-fire. The rounds knocked him flat, and I fired randomly in the direction of the rest of the pack who suddenly decided to act like ragers. I jumped into the car and rolled out as fast as the little Mitsubishi would let me, but a few of them managed to put a some dents in the rear end.

The group was like a bunch of frat boys out playing at being psychotic zombies. More proof that there is something more going on here than meets the eye.

I kept cruising north up Centre Street, looking in the rearview display every few seconds, when out of nowhere something slammed into the side of the Runabout, sending it spinning. I still hadn't buckled in, and no amount of reflex wiring makes spinning out of control in a car any easier, so I got bounced right out of my seat and across the center console. When the car stopped I didn't have time to right myself before whatever hit me the first time hit me again, this time from the rear. The car got thrown forward and I ended up bounced into the glass up on the dash. Which is when I finally got a look at what was pummeling the little car.

It was a fucking *bear*! Not any normal bear, either. It was like the troll of the bear species. Tusks, horns, bone deposits, massive muscles, the full workup. It started to chew on the back end of the car when it caught up again, and I don't mean biting off the spoiler or the bumper. This thing's mouth was large enough to bite the entire back end of the car. I didn't even consider the gun, since I'd seen trolls shrug off shots from it, and this thing was the troll of bears. I really hope anyone reading this understands just how big this thing was. I went with the only option I thought I had: run. Well, actually drive. I hopped back in the driver's seat (and buckled in this time) and waited for that beast to let the back end hit the ground. Then I gunned it. Not that gunning it in a Runabout gets you anywhere fast, but it felt good. Actually, it wasn't fast enough to get away at first, and the bear actually rammed into the back end a few times before I got it up to breakaway speed. In the middle of damn Rox I got attacked by a damn bear—that was the kind of day I was having.

I drove into the heart of the Rox and parked the Runabout at a little pub called Toxic Rox. I got some looks from the smashed-up car, but I ignored every word of it and simply walked in for a drink. The stop turned out to be fruitful. I met another fellow doing things similar to me—well, similar to D.C., but I'm carrying the torch now. We traded data. He got everything up to yesterday, and I got a nice little file on the Rox. [link]

I read his piece over a few more drinks and I'm really thinking the Rox is the place to be. Sad thought. A few things he mentioned caught my attention. The enclaves and Mama's Boyz in control of the Rox Catacombs, for example. I sent Tark a warning, though I'm not sure he got it, and I sent out a whole slew of messages to people I met to see if they'd heard about the enclaves.

That news took up a big chunk of my afternoon.

Another surge of outbreaks has forced people to create their own "cordons" and wall themselves off in what are being called enclaves. According to people out west and up north, the infection is surging again, leading to "spontaneous" cases of encephalitic rage and entire communities being wiped out by one sudden case of this virus. I've gotten a dozen warnings not to travel by foot and to make sure whatever I travel in has plenty of fuel (and ammo) to last if I have to go the roundabout route.

I got word from four different named enclaves—the BrainTrust, the Squares, Harvard, and Chestnut Hill. There were more messages when I checked a little while ago, but these were the only ones I was able to visit today.

Like the Aurora Warrens in Denver, the Redmond and Puyallup Barrens in Seattle, and the CZ in Chicago, the Rox in Boston has a reputation for lawlessness. Every runner worth his street name knows places like this so they know somewhere they can bolt to get away from the local cops.

The heart of the Rox reminds me of old pictures of Las Vegas in its heyday. Neon signs, people everywhere, and a feeling of non-stop debauchery and partying. But looming over the whole thing is an air of authority. An authority that doesn't care how you find your fun as long as they get their cut of the action and you don't mess with their authority. And just like Vegas back in the day, the authority here is the mob.

Don Conor "the Mick" O'Rilley runs the heart of the Rox. His authority there is unquestioned, but the heart of the Rox is only a few square kilometers. Outside this area, the influence of the Don wanes. Other groups claim the neighborhoods spreading out from the heart and they're swallowing more nearby communities each day. Almost all of them still owe some fealty to the Don.

The Ancients are back on the prowl all over the Rox. They're a go-gang for hire, and they don't quite look like they used to. With a need for manpower they've expanded recruitment to non-elves but limited it to Awakened only. I've talked to a few of the newer members and they're happy to be part of the gang, but they know their place. The elves still run the show. They hold the upper ranks, make all the decisions, and get the first pick of the loot and the ladies. It's not a bad gig for anyone with the Talent, though. Resources are abundant and training is a possibility, as well as the companionship of equally special individuals.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Bane-Sidhe have hooked up with the Knights of the Red Branch and have solidified their place in the Rox by taking control of all the local Humanis chapters and recruiting anyone who has ever had an issue with an elf. They're not a go-gang, but they've become quite mobile. Each of their area chapterhouses has a few "chariots," as they call them. To me they look like battlewagons. Souped-up and armored vans, trucks, and RVs that they use to move between their stations, between the budding enclaves, and sometimes into fights with a particular elven gang I may have recently mentioned.

There are five other big gangs keeping the Rox rocking—the Cutters, the Roxx, Mama's Boyz, the Morelli family, and the Yakuza. Each of them controls a section of the Rox around the heart, and most (though not all) still bow down to the authority of Don O'Rilley.

The Cutters control the neighborhoods of Center-South and Roslindale to the southwest. It's a big space and a lot more than they could have handled before the quarantine, but since they've grown their numbers to twenty times what they were before, they're able to deal with it. During the expansions of the gangs, the Cutters were popular for their non-ganglike demeanor. They functioned more like a business, especially in the wake of the massive income flux that came from the tempo boom. The norms liked the fact that they weren't the synthleather-and-chains types and fell in with them. Most of their numbers are norms, but hidden among the regular folks are the more violence-savvy members. The Cutters answer to the Don, but I think they might be double-dipping in the Mafia loyalty pool. The Cutters definitely have a lot of positive opinions about the Morellis, something I wouldn't have expected considering their allegiance to the Don.

The Roxx are the definition of the Rox gang. You can recognize them by their synthleather, chains, and long hair, which is often spiked up in a variety of fashions. They rule West Roxbury and the Jamaica Plain region with their "party like a Roxx star" attitude. Where the heart of the Rox might have some limitations on the entertainment you can find, this area does not. Anything goes here. Street fights are almost constant. Some entrepreneurs have started turning them into profitable little cage matches, but more often than not there are more fights in the audience than in the ring. The average ganger on the street will say that the Roxx are independent and the kings of the neighborhood, but above the street-level-thug bravado, those in charge know that they answer to the Don.

Mama's Boyz have only a limited presence on the street. You'll find their members aboveground around the Egleston Square station, Uphams Corner station, Forest Hills station, Roxbury Crossing station, Brigham Circle station, and Fenwood station. Even if the territory would normally be part of another gang's territory, around the stations it belongs to Mama's Boyz. Along with these stations, Mama's Boyz also claim control of all of the Catacombs beneath this area. The Catacombs aren't as extensive as they are in the Hub, but with the MBTA's network running primarily underground, they have built a lot of side maintenance tunnels, workshops, and storage areas for unused cars and equipment. They also connect to a lot of sewers, basements, and a few natural cave formations. Mama's Boyz don't answer to anyone. In fact, they might be one of the few groups the Don actually fears. Rumors abound about the reclusive Mama and her ghoul lieutenants, but the mere fact that the gang is full of trolls, orks, and dwarves is scary enough. I've been told that the Catacombs around here have killswitches for the power hidden all over. The gang uses them to get an advantage, since many of them can see in the pitch black.

The Morelli family controls the territory of Washington Park just north of the heart and to the east around Brunswick King and Bowdoin North. The fact that they even still exist is a surprise

to many on the Rox. Their territory acts as a buffer between the Don and some of his biggest rivals, the Yakuza. Shortly after the quarantine went into effect, Don Anthony "Fat Tony" Morelli made a big move on O'Rilley's operations. The ruthless Morelli went after any and every bit of Don O'Rilley's shipping, gambling, and protection operations in town. The move would have worked except for the timing. Morelli's plan went off side-by-side with the worst of the Ragers epidemic. His forces were devastated. O'Rilley put a price on Morelli's capture, and the old man couldn't run fast enough or hide well enough.

When he was brought before O'Rilley, the Mick didn't kill him. Instead he let him rebuild and gather his people, giving them the strip of neighborhoods between O'Rilley's domain and the Yakuza's. If the Yakuza ever come for O'Rilley and control of the Rox, Morelli will be a speed bump to slow them down a little. Unless the rumors of Morelli and the Yakuza meeting to talk about teaming up are true.

The Yakuza are the biggest rivals of the Don and his control of the Rox, and they have been for a long time. Their connections to Mitsuhama are rumored enough to be called fact, and those connections have not been broken by the QZ. They control the area north of Washington Park out near Sav-Mor, Dudley Square, and Highland Park. They aren't keen on outsiders, especially ones lacking almond-shaped eyes, so I haven't been able to get a whole lot from them. What I did get, I got second-hand from some Mama's Boys who've done a lot of dealings with them. My connections say the Yakuza have a solid supplier. They get more supply drops than any other area, and quite a few are not on the posted schedule. Those drops also go beyond the standard food, water, and medical supplies. These special drops are rumored to contain arms, armor, ammo, explosives, drones, electronics, and (remember, these are rumors) even men. This is giving the Yakuza a lot of firepower and support, and if no other outside influences intervene, this could drastically alter the underworld scene after the quarantine. That's if it ever ends.

Though not a singular power, when talking a about the Rox and its inhabitants I have to mention the Urban Tribes. Organized in a fashion similar to the gangs but without the urban predator mentality, the Urban Tribes of the Rox lay claim to specific buildings or clusters of buildings. As a group they give off a kind of urban shaman vibe, but they aren't all Awakened. I haven't spoken to many of the tribes. Every building they claim is held by a different tribe, and they aren't connected in any way other than a similar philosophy of life. What I did get from those I talked to was that they don't accept new followers, but they do seek out new people when the spirits of the city tell them to.

They are also fiercely territorial and will defend their buildings with the ferocity of a rabid wolverine. Speaks to the Sun, the leader of one group I spoke to, told me that what they do inside their buildings helps to cleanse the taint of the blight. He wasn't just referring to the quarantine, but to the blight of the Rox. I only understood part of what he was talking about, but a mage I talked to explained that it has something to do with astral space and the emotional taint that gets built up in an area that makes mana more resistant to manipulation. He called it background static or background count.

Since the Rox is so full of them, I might as well add the rumor that a few of these Urban Tribes aren't really worshipping spirits of the city, but instead worship bug spirits and shadow spirits. And instead of cleansing the astral, they are feeding off the negative emotional energy. Other rumors talk about vampires, toxic shamans, and even hidden corporate labs being covered up by fake Urban Tribes. There are so many and they are all different enough that every single one of those rumors could be true. I don't plan on extending my investigation any deeper, because I have no desire to run afoul of any of the aforementioned entities.

As for the virus, it hasn't had much effect here. The Rox is so wild and lawless even your average Rager has nothing on the psycho gangers around here. I've heard of groups of Shamblers out near the edge of the Rox being toyed with before the gangers simply cut them all down. The encephalitis seems to be leaving the denizens of the Rox alone, though their lack of external social contact probably has something to do with that.

THE BRAINTRUST

Locked down tight in Neighborhood Nine, this former Saeder-Krupp corporate security was assigned to a lab at Harvard when the drek hit the fan. They were quick-thinking enough to start corralling the local geniuses into a nice secure spot and locking the doors. When they came out, they pulled in some more of the survivors, locked down a few blocks around the main campus labs, and set out to continue whatever research projects they could that seemed like they would benefit them inside the QZ. The current leader, Feaglin Wilder, was once known as "Foenyks" on the street. They actually made sure to tell me how to spell that when they told me his name, though I already knew who he was. He's well-known in the shadows. More importantly, I actually managed to get a fresh tomato from their rapid-growth research. I ignored the warning that it might not be safe. It was delicious, and I probably needed a good shit anyway.

They're very xenophobic, especially of larger groups, and I only made it in because one of them knew my rep.

The place has a strong military arm and logically smart personnel. It felt a little cold and calculating, but sometimes that's what it takes to survive. I actually heard some chatter that they might start up a few classes again. I bet tuition will be cheap!

THE SQUARES

Tufts University is quite famous to me as the home of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, also known in my circles as "The School of Faces." Professional negotiators and diplomats from around the world have taken time to study here. It's quite an honor for members of the shadow community to be invited (sometimes even sponsored) to attend this prestigious school.

The current class of students have all been very quickly pushed out into the world of harsh diplomacy. Quite a few students have been grabbed by local corp groups and runner teams to work as non-violent negotiators. I'm sure none of the students realize that they're acting as spies, and when they aren't spies they're bait. The students who are still on the campus have pooled their collective negotiating skills into a valuable resource and convinced several other smaller groups to join up with them for mutual safety. One of the first groups they approached were displaced members of a local Knight Errant station that had been overrun. The officers joined up and now work with the students alongside smaller gangs and even a few shadowrunners.

While I was there, marveling at the place, they actually asked me if I had heard anything about the Tufts campus in Chinatown. The two campuses were communicating when the power and grid first returned, but the Chinatown side stopped posting and talking shortly after that, and no one else in that area is responding to grid messages. They asked me to go check it out, and I told them if I got to the area I'd send them a message, but to be honest I fear the worst. I'm sure they do, too.

The blocks around Tufts are where this enclave gets its name. The place is home to a number of runner teams who've helped lock down the area for the locals. I got statements from a few of them before I felt I was wearing out my welcome. [link]

HARVARD

The great fight is being fought by Lower Allston and Harvard University, thanks to the good folks at Knight Errant. A station on campus for the private contract, another station on North Harvard at Kingsley, and their local academy training grounds between Cambridge Street and Western Avenue along the river, meant a lot of officers in a nice tight area. I wasn't here twenty minutes before I'd gotten four job offers, both from KE and a few individuals looking for a personal negotiator, and I got a lot of insight into the area.

They had a problem with Ragers during the recent resurgence but stayed tight. The area has had constant

DEEKS: ASSET ACQUISITION SPECIALIST; LOCATION: POWDER HOUSE SQUARE

"We been doin' mostly cop ops lately. The pawns can't handle the streets and they've been payin' decent nuyen and supplies for some extra help in gettin' this situation under control. I'm not sayin' we're on the KE payroll, but you go where the money is, right?"

MONTANA: MERCENARY FOR HIRE; LOCATION: TEELE SQUARE

"I've been in worse. The QZ is just another hotzone, and luckily I'm on the inside. Means more money for me and easier contracts, with less undercutting slitches trying to snag the work for rep instead of money. My crew and I have been spreading the love. I've been trying to get them to ride one pony, but they don't want to get stuck in the wrong saddle when this drek blows up in someone's face. And it will. This is somebody's fault. And all the corps in here are trying to play the blame game."

JOKER: TACTICIAN AND LEAD NEGOTIATOR; LOCATION: TUFTS

"I recognize myself in the mirror. That's a big deal these days. I know plenty of guys who don't anymore. And I'm not talking in figurative terms. I mean there are guys in here who aren't who they say they are. The face looking back at them in the mirror isn't theirs. Something to do with the 'encephalitis virus,' I'm sure. Probably a different virus, if you know what I mean. Doesn't look like you do. Best discover that on your own, man. You wouldn't believe me even if I did tell you."

CHANCE: ARCANE FIRE SUPPORT; LOCATION: PORTER SQUARE

"Plenty of spots around this place just aren't right anymore. Plenty of folks, too. A lot of taint flowing through the astral these days. I don't even wander out anymore. I mean, astrally project. I already saw you're more machine than meat. You at least get that, right roboreporter?"

TRIDOG (FORMERLY CERBERUS): HEAVY WEAPONS SPECIALIST; LOCATION: DAVIS SQUARE

"Yeah, I had to bail on that other name. Way too much heat. Every time the team made a call to me while any ragers or shamblers were around, they all bolted for me. Not that I couldn't handle the heat, but frag if I felt like ending up like them. Had a pal got the 'ceph, and he wonked out in like two days. Didn't even know his own name, kept calling himself Dayus or something. Wicked nasty at the end. Had to give him walking papers. He could still be out there. Didn't have it in me to off my boy."

problems from the cemetery across the water with shedim (spirits that possess bodies, namely dead ones), so they were already on guard.

I mentioned the BrainTrust possibly starting classes, but the process has already begun at Harvard. The campus is secure enough that students and professors who live nearby or were stuck on campus have started holding classes again. It was admittedly strange to be walking around in my beat-up clothes, with my beat-up pack, and looking like death warmed over, while students were strolling between classes, chatting with friends, or sitting in the park scrolling through texts on their AR feed. It was a nice feeling, though. Safe for a little while. I even took up one of my suitors on their offer of a bath and a clothes wash. Feels good to have clean clothes.

For those interested in work, there are two names to know here: Detective D.J. McCarthy and Commander William "Wild Bill" Parker. McCarthy runs the shadow op assignments for KE in the QZ but operates out of Marblehead. He's not happy to be working with "independent contractors," but even inside the QZ, KE has to operate within its legal limitations. I'm sure if you work for him long enough you might get a smile out of him, but don't expect him to be nice, or even pleasant, when you first meet him.

Parker is the current commander for all of KE in the city. He's got ins across the city and is starting to work hard at coordinating efforts to increase the number of enclaves with KE protection in the QZ. He also tends to handle the Personnel Protection contracts for independent contractors. Some gigs are easy and you just hang out in a nice house and keep the boss happy. Others are street trips into dangerous areas with scientists who have big brains with no space for common sense.

One thing to point out: Not all KE stations are still following Parker's command. Quite a few have gone rogue since the quarantine and formed their own little gangs that hide behind their badge. Parker said Marblehead was still theirs, and he mentioned McCarthy and some work up that way when I asked about it.

CHESTNUT HILL

With other colleges doing so well, I wasn't surprised to hear of another. I made my next stop Chestnut Hill, where the Boston College campus sits nestled up against the local reservoir. I wasn't surprised to find the outskirts abandoned, but I got worried that the college was done for when I couldn't get a message to them on the grid. It turns out they only operate communication systems at certain times of day. They noticed that the number of shamblers and ragers in the area decreased when they turned off their electronics. They've limited their use in the main part of the enclave, which is concentrated onto the main campus, the old historic district, and the near side of the reservoir. They have managed to keep the Boston College T-station within their enclave, but they keep it manned and locked at all times. They appreciate the access to trade, especially now, but they think the Catacombs will be the site of the next outbreak.

They haven't started up any regular classes, but they have organized some exercise programs and martial training for everyone who lives there. They also all have specific jobs and schedules to follow each day. The leader of the group, a former professor of military history at the college, believes order will be the key to getting through the quarantine.

I've been told that all my traveling is a moot process, since everyone on the grid can talk with each other, but I'm still doing it because seeing it with your own eyes is different than seeing it skewed through eyes of fear or naiveté. And the grid sucks! Way too much noise to get a good long-range transmission, and when you do the connection usually only lasts a minute or two.

So after a quiet morning, a strange shambler display, a bear attack, a few (by my standards) drinks in the Rox, and a nice introduction to the developing enclaves, I feel my day has been plenty full. In exchange for a copy of this journal, the kind citizens of Chestnut Hill let me park the Runabout by their gate, allowed me to charge it while the power was still running, and have given me a quiet little cell with a comfortable cot to sleep on. It ain't five-star, but it's secure. I'll sleep well tonight.

MONDAY, JUNE 29, 2076 09:38

I didn't sleep well. Around midnight two members of the Chestnut Hill guard woke me up and rushed me to a lab building near the center of their enclave. It wasn't a pretty scene. There were two dead guards on the way in and a third inside an office. Professor Kuvashi, the enclave's leader, was present and questioned me briefly to see if I knew anything. He didn't accuse me of anything—no surprise due to the condition of the bodies—but the interview did end with a job offer.

The work didn't take long thanks to Jackson, one of the town's guards, who happens to be quite skilled at tracking. Whatever—yes, *what*, not *who*—attacked that lab slipped out of the enclave promptly after the attacks. Kuvashi wasn't willing to tell me what was worth killing for in that lab, though I could tell he knew.

My pay was an offer to stick around, and I'm taking them up on it. I'll stop my travels for now. Maybe I'll dig at Kuvashi a little more, but I think my main focus is going to be cracking that *Salem Exposed*! file D.C. got his paws on while I have somewhere to settle. Time to send this around to see if anyone else can get it out of the quarantine.

FRIDAY, JULY 3, 2076 21:41

My luck today has run like it's Friday the 13th, not the 3rd Most of this week was nice. I slept in a decent bed for a few nights, ate decent meals, and had some decent showers. I had a few days to try to break into the

file but got nowhere. It's just not my specialty. But then this morning it all went south.

I wanted to take a little time, maybe even do a little soul-searching and work to let myself come to terms with some things that had happened since the lockdown. That's a great idea when you're tired and looking for answers in those moments of exhausted philosophy. In reality, I didn't get even close to that because I just couldn't stop looking around, I just stopped traveling. There are a few other people out there like D.C., naive seekers of truth, and I've spread the journal around to get a look at their pieces. I've avoided sending the *Salem Exposed!* file recently, partly out of worry, partly due to the fact that I had such horrible connections I didn't think the file would get where I was sending it, but mostly because I just had a feeling that the file was bad news. Turns out I was right.

I need to get a bunch of stuff down right now, so let me break it down. Here's the good, the bad, and the ugly.

THE GOOD

Not necessarily good in the terms of news that leads to a pleasant or beneficial outcome, but more that it's something good to know. Info coming in from sources around the QZ have this trend of building enclaves increasing, but there have been a few warnings about places to avoid, and a few people have pointed out that the various enclaves aren't communicating. Add into that data I got from Tark about some of the Catacombs entrances, and I'm seeing an interesting picture forming.

Revere, already featured in D.C.'s work with a slave camp of some kind and those wonderful dicks over at the hotel, seems to be growing and making pleasant invitations to anyone in the Boston area who wants to settle there. The only problem is that I'm pretty sure bad drek is going down over there, so anyone taking their offer is in for trouble. I'm trying to get warnings out but I'm not sure anyone will listen to me over an entire town.

Chelsea has two stories. There's some voices coming out of the area from a group of people who sound like true survivalists. Their messages are a little tinged with rhetoric, recognizable crap from the New Revolution. Whoever gathered up this cluster of survival specialists is definitely a big fan of the former U.S. of A. and looking to gather in more friends of the former nation.

The second story comes from the silence of a group living behind fortifications erected around a cemetery under the towers. Word I gathered was a group lived inside the cemetery who weren't running any kind of comms but were aggressively defending their territory. Folks I've talked to said the cemetery is gaining a lot of occupants (the traditional kind), both infected and survivors. I don't know what it's like in there now. Sacred ground beneath the shadows of the towers.

Malden was smack dab in the path of the dragon that most think started all this. When he flew north, rain fell from him like a curse. It seems Malden may be a haven for those who came out on the wrong side of that curse. Survivors up that way have been hard to come by, and those who have come through seem to have acquired those strange personality changes that we've noted throughout this report. From Kip freaking on D.C. all the way to the strangeness at Logan that Kodiak reported, life inside the zone has had some personality disorder problems. Malden is reported to have an enclave, but no communication is coming from there. No invites, no messages, and rumor has it the place is growing upward. Buildings are rising even though there is a quarantine up. I'd say bullshit if it didn't come from sources I'd really call reliable.

Dedham is like the polar opposite of Malden. They're "calling all cleans," as they say, and looking to build a haven near the wall that can start getting folks out of the zone. It's drawn a lot of people out, and the roads of the Rox and the areas around Dedham are riddled with the dead who tried to get there. The concentration of shamblers and ragers is low this far south, but it's enough to keep people from moving safely. Careful heading toward Dedham. I think they're on the level, but they aren't helping anyone get there. You're on your own for that.

The Shipyards, as I call them, are hot to trot. They may be the original enclave. They locked down their territory early and made sure to let everyone know they weren't playing around. The Shipyards have tossed plenty of bodies into the Harbor, both survivors and infected, because they don't want trouble of any kind. They're like a cleaner version of the Rox because they're newer. Same "everything goes" attitude, but without the years of garbage dumped on them.

South Boston is close to the Shipyards, but they are not so cool, calm, and collected. What do you expect from Southie? The place is split three ways between gangs, locals (who are really just a gang), and the wandering crazies. I got a lot of info from here—Southies like to chat—and it seems like a nice microcosm of the entire quarantine. The gangs are on the move and causing trouble, the locals are hunkered down into small groups that fight each other in between fights with the gangs and crazies, and the crazies are out wandering around everywhere. Want an idea of what the QZ is like overall? Come here for a taste, but hope you have connections, 'cause the Southies will let you rot if you aren't a Southie. And if you are and need to duck into the wrong hood, best be ready for a beatdown, then a drink.

Peabody is where all the sensible people up near Salem seem to have taken refuge. I got word from them thanks to Tark. They're locked down and trying to stay out of the craziness that is going on in Salem. The problem is I'm not sure why they're staying out of it. The infection was pretty strong up that way, D.C. saw that firsthand with the apparent emptiness of the place, but now Peabody has a solid enclave that is claiming to be neutral and outside all the action around Salem. Strangest part

is, the area they claim to hold is huge. They'd need a lot of numbers to hold it, and that's a little unnerving.

I saved Lynn Woods Reserve until late in this write-up because, well, it's just the most amusing to me and I needed as many smiles today as I could get. This place is a massive tract of land that should be listed among the Wilds, but instead I'm listing it among the enclaves because an extremely skilled hunter has made the place his own personal crazy preserve. Rumors suggest that this person is Damon, but I've got good intel he's elsewhere, and this place is still holding it down as a big patch of land where people can feel safe walking around in some fresh air. I have also heard that a number of the hunts that go on here are not conducted by two-legged predators, and that a number of hyper-intelligent four-legged infected have been stalking this area. I don't think it's the case, but this might have been the origin of the beast that attacked Chestnut Hill.

I've caught a few mentions of an all-Native enclave in the Wilds out near Lexington. The rumors say they tie non-Natives to the walls to draw critters from the Wilds and the critters keep the crazies away in protection of their easy food supply. They've put out a lot of job offers to get supplies, including trying to find hackers who have the skill to redirect drops to them. If I had to guess, at some point they'll get some corporate support from Horizon or the PCC, but I imagine their remote location is not prime real estate for the corps to support.

Last spot I'll mention is Stoneham. They've got an enclave and they accept useful additions, but they're seriously picky about what they consider useful. The intel I've seen on them mentions a serious security force with pro-level response times and tactics, but no one seems to know where they came from. Rumors abound, but none so credible that I need to include them right now.

THE WAR OF NORTHERN AGGRESSION

POSTED BY: SOUL OF THE SOUTH

The tale of the dragons coming deserved the flowery tale I wove, but the next part deserves facts, as cold and hard as the people they are about. Salem has attracted a lot of attention since the quarantine. It's not the town itself, it is exactly what one would expect: the dragon. Five groups have come north in force to push forward their unspoken goals. Those who are jockeying to cause trouble up here are NeoNET, Evo, Aztechnology, Knight Errant, and the mysterious tech whizzes. I've worked to get close and listen around their bases of operations, but it wasn't easy. Appreciate the little I have, I am but a single journalist.

NEONET

NeoNET has taken a section of Salem near the Salem Commons. The witches haven't tried to fight them off and likely wouldn't be able to if they tried. According to rumor, Celedyr is there. I would have bet he fled the QZ, but there are enough rumored spottings of him to make me second-guess that. The rumors are further fueled by the presence of Zoh Rothberg, voice of the dragon. She's actually the head of the operations up here from what I can tell. I'd say that means Celedyr is in charge, but I'm not sure that means he's physically there. Their operations seem to be focusing on making contact with Eliohann and protecting him from some of the others. It's interesting, as the first thing Eliohann did was attack their towers downtown, but who can ever understand the actions of plague-crazed dragons.

EVO

Evo has forces collected on the southern bank of the Waters River at one of their own manufacturing plants. The plant, once a place to manufacture cybernetics, along with bioware culture facilities, was turned into an armed camp a few days after the dragon (rumors give it the name of Eliohann, but that sounds insane to me) arose from the lake. I don't know what operations they are running from there, but I do know they are following the marching orders of a dwarf named Creech, Aaron Creech. The name isn't familiar to me, but he could be Evo black ops, or just an insider shifted into a position of power in this insanity.

AZTECHNOLOGY

Aztechnology took over Swampscott High School in the center of the town of it's named for, and it was a major sponsor of the school before the quarantine. They are running quite a bit of wetwork according to the runners I know. They have plenty of intel ops, extractions, courier runs, and other shadow ops on the books as well, but if you enjoy killing, get cozy with the Azzies. You'll have plenty of work. Their ops are run by a pair of bosses named Sandellero and Chen. At first I thought they were boss and bodyguard, but they both seem to run operations. My runner contacts insist that Sandellerro is a blood mage. Not that it changes the color of his money, but sometimes morals are more valuable than cash. Sometimes.

KNIGHT ERRANT

Knight Errant, though universally present in the QZ, has a strong force out on Marblehead at the high school. They moved heavy numbers of officers up to the Marblehead station and then slowly took control of the high school down the street. They seem to be running investigations in the area. There are plenty of mysteries they could be trying to solve, though I'd guess they are looking for the culprit behind this ridiculous mess. If not, "The culprit is Ares, and they are covering it up," as my runner associates are fond of saying. The schools are under the control of Detective McCarthy, a reluctant KE knight coordinating the shadow soldiers.

THE MYSTERY TECHMASTERS

The fifth force confuses me, as I can't find a recognizable corporation for them, but they have some serious tech skills. They could be MCT or Renraku, or even another faction of NeoNET, but they're based out of an old vocational high school surrounded by plants and mills over in Peabody. They remain a mystery to me, but I've heard the name "Pax" floated in their midst. I know the name and it could be rumor, but this sounds like a plan right up that crazy slitch's alley.

THE HOME TEAM

The dragon that might be Eliohann and the Children of the Dragon are, for all intents and purposes, now the home team. Though Salem has a history of Wiccan tradition, the efforts of Damon have reshaped the mana, and dragon magic is the new powerhouse here. Maybe the party dragon knew what was coming and wanted to stop the virus from getting further, but for now he has not been seen, and maybe-Eliohann has taken to ruling the roost up here.

I've also heard a trio of other names whispered among the rank and file, one of which does not make me happy. Cerberus, a well-known AI in the employ of NeoNET, is somehow involved with this group. Cereus, a name I haven't heard before, seems to have the greatest amount of control up here. And then last (the name I hate to mention) is Deus. The AI whose name keeps the shadows up at night has been mentioned in the whispers among the weak of faith.

Last, but not least, I need to mention the delusion of the masses here. If we're going to have Eliohann, why not add Dunkelzahn? The Children of the Dragon believe that the spirit of Dunkelzahn has come forth to inhabit the abandoned shell of Eliohann. The most devout of the Children claim that Dunkelzahn is battling for control of the body with other energies, and that is why his glorious reign has not begun. The least devout think the maybe-Eliohann form is not inhabited by Dunkelzahn at all but is instead inhabited by something else, something dark. From what I can tell, there are rifts occurring within the Children, but the inner circle is too devout for doubt.

With six different groups doing ghost knows what to each other up here, the area in and around Salem is definitely an interesting place to be. I'll be leaving and heading south. As interesting as it is, I have no desire to take part in the fun. Instead, I think I'm going to take a few more looks around and maybe, just maybe, find a quiet little corner where I can hang my hat and wait this out.

It's a lot to take in, and it's likely only a fraction of what's out there. Be ready for anything.

THE BAD

I broke down the stuff on other areas so it matches the style D.C. wanted, but I'll give part of this stuff straight. I got this report from a runner pal with strong neo-a connections. He knows what I've been doing and wanted it to be part of my work. He gave me a nice compliment by saying I have some of the best chances of getting this stuff out.

I'll add that I've gotten a few messages from teams up in that area looking for a guy like me to tag along, but I've held off. I've been a pro and kept from asking too many questions. Sorry. I'd like to think I'll still need my rep after this all gets cleared up.

THE UGLY

I think someone is after this document, and I think it has to do with the *Salem Exposed!* piece. I mentioned an incident in Marblehead a while ago. I dismissed it as runners and just normal trouble, but I've gotten news from a few other places where D.C. and I stopped.

I got four more messages from other areas. Comms suck around here. The only positive thing I can say is that the system that's in place will hold messages pretty well until the recipient is finally in range of a working grid. At least, that's my opinion. Point is, I got four messages: one from Revere for the kid, one from Lynn, one from my pal Kodiak at Logan, and the last from the shipyards.

Word from Revere is that a team of runners came looking for someone matching D.C.'s description and asking about a file he might have had in his possession, maybe traded for something early on. Whoever was looking didn't realize when he got the file, but the sender, a guy named Asus, said that D.C. should come back to the area and they'd protect him. It was a strange message, full of cold word usage contrasted by the use of old-fashioned emoticons. I didn't respond, since it was sent to D.C., but I'm sure as hell not going anywhere near Revere (as you can see from my earlier Good section).

The message from Lynn was a fucking kick to the gut. Addressed to the kid and me, by fucking name, it talked about a group that broke into their town center. They said the group was looking for information on D.C. and even had the gall to mention him in the past fucking tense. The kid died trying to save one of their useless little groups and they have the ... okay. Calming down. They asked if I was in possession of any of D.C.'s equipment, even though they clearly knew I had his 'link, since they sent the message to that address. I actually killed his 'link about two minutes later after I dragged all his files over to my device. I have a plan using his 'link that will help me see if anyone is really on my tail.

What a day!

Next message was from Kodiak—a.k.a. Matt Noel—over in Logan. He had the best intel for me, but it still didn't mean squat. He detailed a group of six runners, two of whom were doing the whole "we don't know those guys" act. They played the enthusiastic recruit game and then bailed in the night after asking more questions about other people who came through than about the actual place itself. He said he could just tell they were digging after me. He warned me that the leadership at Logan put a small team out after this group and that he'd heard rumors a team was going to be sent after me to find out why someone was so interested. I'm not sure why, but I think I made a pretty solid friend in that guy.

Last message came from Vassilli Andrekov. He's a former crewman working at the shipyards who rented me that nice corner of the Maersk freight container. I left him my address in case I needed to head back that way or if he had any more info on how the shipyards were growing. That place has some solid potential, and I wanted to keep up to date on what was going on over there. Instead of getting an update, I heard that some slick elf came by looking for me. It wasn't that explicit, but reading between the lines was pretty easy, even for the former sea hand. The elf was interested in any files I might have traded or other people I might have talked to. Vassilli gave him the runaround and then sent me a message about a half second after they walked out.

From what I can get from everything that was sent to me, I have a team of six runners on my trail. There's a male elf (likely their face), two orks (both male), a male and a female human, and a female troll. They haven't been specific about what they're after, but they've been asking about traded files, so I have to guess they mean the journal and the *Salem Exposed!* file specifically. From Kodiak's group rundown they seem pretty combat heavy, but he confirmed the human male to be some sort of spellslinger. I might need to hire someone to watch my ass. Or ditch this file and duck for cover.

I ran down that stuff, but I need to give the summary for today. I was out of Chestnut Hill early, so I got some traveling in today. Back on the road.

First thing I did out of CH was snag a car. I couldn't reach Tark for help, but I remembered enough. I took a drive along the fences of the MIT&T cordon, a primary target for operations in this area. Even during the day I could hear the occasional gunfight spark up. The area over the cordon looked a lot like the QZ border, with drones hovering everywhere and even a few spirits waiting for something to do, but there was no fog. I managed to see a lot of the shamblers a few blocks in from the fences on the MIT&T campus. Their numbers seem never-ending. These ones were pretty far outside the central buildings where all the action was. It's a sad sight.

I knew I wasn't getting the car across a bridge, and since I was over that way I found one of the Catacomb entrances and took a shortcut back over to the Hub. I popped back up over near the Route 3 bridge to mark

another entrance for Tark, since he hadn't hit that one yet, and took a quick look around. I swear I was planning to slip right back underground, but I thought I saw something down in Back Bay, so I hugged the riverfront and headed toward the rows of brownstones still trying to catch another glimpse of whatever it was. When I did, I called out, and started running after him. It was D.C. I was positive.

Those brownstones aren't a place to go chasing ghosts. I wasn't more than a block in when the first of the psychos came out of an alley behind me. When I bolted for a narrow space between them, I had to shoot my way out the other end while two more pushed in coming at me. They didn't go down easy; I'm not even sure they stayed down.

I full sprinted up Beacon and then cut into the Commons. I swear the pack on my hoop was probably forty strong and gaining. I pushed hard, cleared the far end of the Commons, then made it about another block when all of a sudden the AR field from my glasses just blinked out, followed by an error message from the smartgun system on my pistol. I had just about reached the end of my breath anyway and knew that with no smartgun and my tactical feed on the fritz, I was as good as dead. I ducked in around a corner and just leaned on the wall.

I found myself with a strange sense of awe as I looked up while trying to catch my breath. I had managed to reach the old East Cost Stock Exchange building. It was a marvel, even without any AR overlays to feed me info on it. I was almost happy the systems went dead when they did, and I was oddly pleased by the thought of dying in front of such an absolutely grand place. It had a little bit of the creepy gothic going but seemed pleasant compared to the creep factor of the rest of the Hub.

I was smiling and laughing to myself a little when I realized no one had come around the corner. I peeked my head back around, and the entire group was about fifty meters back, all hissing, yelping, and gnashing their teeth in my direction. And then I realized it wasn't in my direction; they were directing it at the ECSE building. Something about the building was keeping them at bay. I wasn't about to look that gift horse in the mouth, so I followed the real signs to where the nearest subway entrance was and headed for the Catacombs. My systems all rebooted once I got a block or so away from the pack of psychos, but I think it had more to do with the ECSE.

I remember something about Mitsuhama owning it. They must have had some kind of experiment or something going on inside when the quarantine kicked in and just haven't turned it off. It certainly kept me away, and I'm sure it would keep all but the most die-hard technophobe from getting too close.

I shot Tark a message as soon as I hit the Catacombs. He replied pretty quick and said he was up near Saugus doing some private work. He hadn't tagged any entrances that way, so I figured it was real private and let it drop.

I was relatively close, so I shot over near Chinatown since for some reason I was suddenly reminded of the BU guys in CH. No one in Chinatown is making any calls because the whole area is controlled, very tightly, by the local Asian gangs. I've been in a lot of sprawls around the world, and the one thing I can always say for the Asian gangs is that they know when to band together. They may be at each other's throats when all this is done, but for now they seem to be working together to keep a lid on Chinatown and prevent anyone from coming in and messing up their little Oriental paradise.

I didn't get in, not even close. I got all that from a Catacombs rat who was kicked out of Chinatown for disobeying the rules. According to him, the rule he disobeyed was refusing to execute a kid who had the encephalitis. After he had already recovered! According to a few of the scientists they had living there, the only reason they would keep the quarantine in effect after the virus had run its course is if it was still viable after infection. That means that anyone who had it can still spread it even if they have already overcome the disease. Not the best news.

By the time I'd gathered that little tidbit, I'd had my fill of crazy for the day and didn't want to stay the night in the Catacombs thanks to the runners on my tail and the sad relationship I had with Mama's Boyz. I popped up out by Malden and ducked into the nearest building I thought I could get secured. I'm having my first sleepover inside a McHugh's playland. The ball pit is actually pretty comfortable.

SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2076 08:43

I would recommend sleeping in a ball pit to anyone. Outside of the occasional sound of distant gunfire and the raccoons that snuck into the restaurant to forage for food, that was the best night of sleep I think I've ever gotten, including before the quarantine. I'm holing up here until I can get someone to cover my ass for a bit. I have a message out to Tark. I'll sit tight until then. Getting back to work on cracking *Salem Exposed!*.

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2076 20:13

This must be what I get for not taking notes for a week. Looks like time's up. I pulled in a team to watch my ass, but one turned traitor and shit went south. The runners who were on my ass are close, and the team I contracted all paid the ultimate price for me. This is fucking bullshit!

I fucking made it this far, but now I'm fucking stuck! The hounds have been on my tail since Jade woke me at four this morning. We kept ahead of them until we reached the North Station Towers Condoplex in the Hub. This place has been the tower of death. We lost Jade in the lobby, Arcon on the 14th floor, Trancer and Vague on 44, and Kell is bleeding out from a gut wound in the stairwell here on 77. He's clutching a couple high-

ex bangers tight, waiting for the assholes who've been dogging me.

We came here because it's the tallest structure on the west side of the Hub, with one hundred floors of condos rising up to about four hundred meters above the street. I'd get a clean view out to the edge of the QZ and beyond from the roof, which was my goal, but instead I'm holed up here in 7711 listening for the kick squad on my tail to either start breaking down the doors of the condos on this floor or run afoul of Kell. Either way, it just tells me they're close.

Time to wrap up the journal, download it into whatever devices I can, send it out as far and wide as it'll go, and hope that someone spreads the word. This is my karmic reward for cracking the encryption on the *Salem Exposed!* file. I haven't even gotten to look at it. Vague gave me the upload as we bolted. Fucking Murphy.

So much for the laser transmitter, don't think the roof is in my future.

Goodbye, cruel world.

D.C., I'm finally on your six again.

SALEM EXPOSED!

POSTED BY: WITCHWATCHER

Salem, Massachusetts, has a sordid history full of corruption, fearmongering, witchcraft, and dark secrets … and that's only in the past month. Since the establishment of the Northeastern Metroplex Axis Quarantine Zone (NEMAQZ), better known as the QZ, or "cues" for short, Salem has become a hotbed of corporate intrigue, arcane shenanigans, and draconic deification. Things are definitely exciting in what has been called "the most magical city in America."

Even before the Corporate Court and UCAS Government ordered the quarantine, Salem had already been suffering a sort of civil war. Witches and warlocks of the town were taking sides in one of the most heated issues in Salem history: to dragon or not to dragon. Since early '74, a dragon by the name of Damon has been participating in the Wiccan festivities around Salem during every sacred day. At first this was great, as it brought a level of attention to the religion that it had not seen since its strong revival post-Awakening. But there were those within the Wiccan culture who felt the presence of the dragon was taking away from the value of the Wiccan ideals and the cultural message of the religion. This group felt the dragon was a sideshow act that was taking over the main stage.

The two groups gradually divided the populace between those who supported the dragon's presence and those who wanted him to cease his participation and leave their religious gatherings. The division was not initially violent—violence is not the Wiccan way. What started as a simple difference in philosophy between two groups of very similar individuals grew into a matter of politics, and then further into a matter of right and wrong.

Other groups began to add their influence, and often not in the way they intended. The Children of the Dragon, a religious group that worships the passed spirit of the Great Dragon Dunkelzahn, came to join forces with those who supported the participation of Damon, only to create a schism that pulled power from the group they were trying to support. While members of the Humanis Policlub came to support those who wanted Damon gone, they managed instead to pull a few of the more radical human supporters to their cause and give everyone else a new target to push out of their community.

The groups were rumored to have begun quietly warring, and sources I trust confirm that those who wanted Damon gone had contracted with illicit operators—shadowrunners—to attack some of what was believed to be Damon's interest in the area: locally produced bio-Awakened drugs, or BADs. By destroying the supply of these substances, the group hoped to divert the dragon's attention elsewhere. The tactic had little success according to my source and pulled in other forces from local gangs and crime syndicates feeling the pinch on their supply lines. The shadow war continued to boil before the quarantine, and it continued after the arrival of a new dragon stirred the pot.

According to my sources, the quarantine is not what it appears. It is instead a cover for an accidental release of a corporate-engineered virus. This was not an extremely rare and deadly encephalitis virus like the news says. In fact, from what I understand, this virus was not intended to kill at all. It was intended to heal. The virus was a cure for whatever was keeping the dragon Eliohann in a coma. And it worked.

Eliohann awoke from his coma sometime on the evening of the 15th around 1900 hours. He was the dragon that emerged from MIT&T, attacked the NeoNET Towers, and crashed the BoSox game. For unknown reasons the dragon did not take well to the virus, became violent and out of control, and then went on his rampage. The rampage resulted in massive damage to the lab, extensive damage to Fenway Park and Tower 4 of the NeoNET Towers, and minor damage to towers and assorted buildings around the Hub. The rampage was not the worst part, though. With his flight from the lab, Eliohann began spreading the virus out to Boston and then north.

THE IRIDESCENT RAIN

Many commented on this phenomenon, most marveling at its beauty. But that beauty was like the bright beautiful colors of the poison arrow frog, a warning to which fools fall prey. The rain carried the virus as it fell to the ground and hovered in the air, and those who marveled doomed themselves. Some of that iridescence still hovers in the air, or floats on the waterways, but the worst of it flows through the bloodstreams of the infected. Those whose minds have been laid low. The feral remnants of once sentient beings.

The rain did not end with us. It fell to those we cast our eyes over as well. It fell on beasts as well as men, and those beasts have not been laid low but have instead been raised up. I have witnessed with my own eyes the wonder of creatures whose minds we would once have thought only capable of sleeping, hunting, killing, eating, and breeding etch words of warnings in the dirt. We do not need to simply fear the monsters that have been made of men, but the beasts that have been raised up and now stalk the world of men.

But fear is not all we have. Hope lies to the north. Hope lies with those who halted the raging dragon and stopped the madness from taking more.

SALEM SAVES THE DAY

The story around Salem plays out like a fairy tale without the happily ever after. It is a tale of mystic divination revealing cryptic foresight and heroic tragedy that brought the witches back together, only to tear them further apart. As the dragon flew north, warnings flew out before him, but not radio signals or spirit messengers. No, the warnings of the coming dragon came long before the plague-bearer flew north, long before he even came to the northeast. The tale of the coming dragon came on the night of the Crash.

Seers among the witches of Salem saw the wyrm that night. Most thought it referred to the electronic beast of Deus, but the wise knew foretelling was just that. It did not see the events of today, it saw the events of tomorrow. The seers saw the plague-bearer dragon come north and be laid low by a child. Many held to their comforting fallacy, that the dragon was gone and the future was safe.

The tale twisted further with the coming of Damon. Among those who still held to the visions, some saw Damon as the wyrm, but others still did not believe, as Damon did not come bearing plague. He twisted the mana, he made their rituals more powerful than they could control, but he brought no doom to them. That battle blinded so many that when the truth finally came, many could not put down their pride and accept their ignorance, and the plague very nearly brought the town of Salem to extinction.

The saviors of Salem are not the witches, though they helped. The true saviors of Salem were the Children of the Dragon, as it had been seen. A child laying the dragon low. The battle occurred south of town, though tales say it was not much of a battle. As the iridescent beast flew north, the witches sought to stop it, but their petty arguments over Damon had severed their coven so greatly they could not draw the power to challenge the dragon. But the Children were fueled by the twisting of the mana, fueled by what others saw as Damon's corruption. The dragon had not doomed them as they thought, but saved them.

Spells and spirits flew to the approaching Eliohann. The iridescent plague was rent from his skin. The mad malice could not be calmed from his mind, so his mind was pulled to its brink and beyond. The malachite beast crashed into Quarry Lake.

The Children held vigil beside the steep sides of the lake and waited for the beast to rise again. They waited for the spirit to take hold of the vessel they had brought down and the light of Dunkelzahn to return to the world. The witches, unified in terror and fear, began to divide again. Some pushed to send the Children away, fueled by anger at being saved in their own land. Others saw the Children as their saviors, as hope and light personified. They sought to join the Dragon Worshippers and were welcomed with open arms. A third group thanked the Children for their actions and simply held to the Wiccan way—the course of nature, the power of the light, and the rule of three. Damon slipped from their minds, replaced by a new dragon to worry them.

The core group of believers waited by the waters for three days and nights. Their chanting was said to never waver, never cease, and in the end the dragon rose from the waters and came into their ranks. It spoke to their minds, a tale none would speak to me, but they went with it into the heart of Salem and declared their demands. They sought rights to the lands north of the sacred lake, the forest and wilds, a small section of homes, and the local high school.

Standing before a dragon and his worshippers, at the focus of a ley line of great power aligned to them and fueling their abilities, the witches had no choice but to relent. The dragon went from them, the Children thanked them, and the quiet truce of Salem was struck. A truce held in trust by the parties who made it but ignored by those who came after.

BEANTOWN BOUND

JUNE 2, 2076, 22:33 HOURS, SEATTLE METROPLEX

A.J. glanced to the time display in the corner of his AR HUD for what might have been the hundredth time in three minutes. The meet was supposed to be at 22:30 hours, but thanks to a massive backup that he was sure was caused by some stupid-hoop runners, he was going to be late. He hated being late. It was never a good thing for him, of all members of the team, to be late. Johnsons didn't like being kept waiting, and Dorian, the team's resident spellslinger, would likely start to talk. That never seemed to work out well.

Rolling up in front of the Alabaster Maiden at 22:34, A.J. saw Gnarl, two-and-a-half meters of pure troll muscle, bouncing the door while Adrian, a handsome and lecherous human, was scanning PANs (and asses) in the small queue seeing who he might let jump the line tonight.

Rolling to a stop, A.J. wrote up a quick mental message through his headware commlink for Adrian, attached 100 nuyen, and then slid smoothly out the driver's door while leaving his car running. He was in a hurry, but this club was not a place you just strolled right in. There were traditions.

A.J. approached the namesake for the famous Seattle nightclub with reverence. Removing his trilby with his left hand, he placed it over his heart while reaching his right up to touch the hand of the most iconic statue in Seattle.

"You look enchanted as usual, Ms. Dematto," A.J. said with a smooth tone and a slight bow of his head. His mouth turned a slight smirk; the joke was old but still amusing as he raised his eyes back to the statue. He let his fingers brush off its smooth alabaster surface, slipped his black trilby back on his head, then made a beeline for the door.

Dropping another fifty nuyen into Gnarl's tip jar, he strolled past with a nod, ignoring the grumbling and griping from the small crowd.

Inside, he stopped at the coat check to turn over his coat and the trilby. He wired the attendant twenty nuyen and asked her to keep them near the front. She smiled, but as A.J. began to walk away she called out to him.

Slightly annoyed and expecting some sort of juvenile come-on, he managed a smile and asked, "Did you need something else?"

"I'm sorry, sir. The scanner says you have a firearm. I know the license on your PAN allows it, but the club has strict weapons policies. Only federal officers and Knight Errant police personnel are allowed to carry their weapons in the club. I can check it for you with your coat if you would like." The girl spoke the words by rote in a high-pitched monotone that told A.J. no amount of schmoozing or money, short of a lottery windfall, would make this girl look the other way.

Unfastening the top two buttons his vest, he reached in and pulled out the pistol from his shoulder rig. Popping out the clip he manually ejected the round from the chamber before handing the big Colt Government 2066 over to the coat-check girl. He tucked the loose round into his vest pocket and put the gun's clip into the empty holster. *Why give someone else your bullets if you didn't have to?*

The chrono in the corner of his vision already read 22:36 when he stepped through the crystal-beaded curtains and into the club. For a Tuesday night the place was rather busy but still not crowded. He laughed a little at the fact that the club was still keeping a line outside even through they had plenty of room inside. He knew all about the need to keep up appearances, hence his account being almost two hundred nuyen lighter even though he hadn't taken the job or even had a decent drink yet.

The Alabaster Maiden was a typical nightclub. Loud music, dance floors, tables, booths, couches, a trio of bars, and youthful (or clinging to youthful) patrons having the time of their lives on a Tuesday night. It was famous for the legendary statue out front and the holographic light shows it regularly put on, along with the arcane acts it often brought in on the weekends. The light show wasn't currently running. A.J. looked up into the haze and gloom near the ceiling and could see the techs sitting in their hexagonal headquarters, readying the next display.

A.J. found it a slight relief that he didn't have to push his way through people to get to the bar. As he approached, he saw Cammy working the near side. He caught her eye, and she gave a little nod and pulled one of the bottles from the back right corner of the stacks behind the bar. Anyone who ever worked behind a bar knows that you lay out your common bottles along the bottom row, starting with synthvodka and synthtequila

at the center. The further back and to the right or left you got, the rarer it was for a bottle to get used. The really rare stuff was locked up. A shot of the stuff in the back row usually ran from twenty up to one hundred nuyen. The Maiden had class.

A.J. had already prepped the two transactions he needed before he bellied up to the bar. When Cammy came over with the shot glass filled to the rim with what he called "golden bear juice," he released both transactions. The first went to the club and paid the one hundred nuyen tab he had just created. The second went to Cammy's tip icon, another one hundred nuyen, which was for using a double glass for his whiskey and being the prettiest bartender in the place.

"Johnson, party of six. They here yet, beautiful?" A.J. asked with smile.

"Went back about five minutes ago. Brutus was already getting into the bottle," Cammy warned. Then she smiled. "Thanks for the tip, but you know I'd still rather have the dinner you've been promising."

A.J. flipped the double shot back and swallowed the whole thing in one wonderfully fiery gulp. He let himself enjoy the full burn before he spoke again.

"Next Monday. I know you're off. I'll get reservations at The Edge. You like elven cuisine, right?" A.J. enjoyed the feeling of almost being normal. It was going to cost him a few favors to get a short-notice table at one of the premier elven eateries in Seattle, but a normal date would be worth it; much better than using favors to get snuck into warehouses and onto shipping vessels.

"Yes!" Cammy said, but she communicated even better with her body language, lunging across the bar and hugging A.J. It was remarkably unprofessional of her, and honestly of him as well, but he was already late. Might as well rack up the bad juju all at once.

When Cammy released him, she quickly regained her composure and then shooed him away to his meeting. But she made sure to remind him about Monday a few more times.

A.J. walked toward the back with an extra spring in his step. As soon as he reached the room, the joy of the moment slipped from his mind and he focused on the business at hand.

"Sorry I'm late," A.J. said as he stepped into the Alabaster Maiden's back meeting room. He didn't direct the remark at anyone specific and went into no further detail. He just did exactly what he wanted to: gained the attention of everyone in the room.

Seated around a finely crafted marble table were six people. Five he knew, one he did not, and that unknown figure was the one he focused on. He was human, tanned skin, late thirties, average frame, probably 1.85 meters. He had blended features, likely making him an American-mutt, wore an expensive but not tailored suit, likely making him a mid-level corporate Johnson, and he was wearing a ring emblazoned with the meso-American sun symbol, likely meaning he had absolutely no connection to anything in that region. The watch peeking out from under his sleeve was a decoration that wasn't even telling the correct time. His tie tack and cufflinks didn't match and were in fact two completely different fashion lines, and his commlink, which was sitting on the table, had a Renraku case, but was using a Transys layout for his PAN. The details were there and A.J. quickly built an identity for the Johnson in the few moments it took him to take his seat.

"I'm A.J. I'll presume you're Mr. Johnson. Our discussion of employment terms begins now. I don't care what you convinced any of my colleagues to say, they don't do our negotiations. I do. What are your terms?" A.J. was quick, deliberate, and cold. Along the sides of his vision he could see his teammates, and he could feel the glares of Dorian and Rain, who had both probably started to wheel and deal. He ignored them and kept his eyes locked with Mr. Johnson's.

"Two weeks, multiple objectives. One hundred fifty thousand for your team." The man's eyes never budged.

"More detail," A.J. said.

"He wants us to go to the East Coast—Boston, specifically—and do some work for him. If you were on time, you would have gotten that info," Rain said.

Mr. Johnson's eyes broke the staredown and looked over at Rain. When they returned to A.J., he was still staring at him.

"Is that accurate?" A.J. asked with a slight eyebrow raise but no shift of his eyes.

"Yes. We also disc ..." Mr. Johnson stopped abruptly as A.J. cut him off.

"Two hundred for the team. Twenty for travel expenses. Thirty for discretionary spending," A.J. put out the numbers and still kept his gaze locked.

"One sixty, I'll arrange travel, and ten to grease the Hub," the Johnson replied quickly. To A.J., that meant he had wiggle room and the negotiations weren't settled. After a little more back-and-forth, A.J.'s withering gaze got the final numbers to a hundred eighty thousand for the team, the full twenty for travel, and twenty for discretionary spending, which to him meant bribes and to the others meant partying.

After the negotiations, Mr. Johnson transferred their travel funds to A.J. along with ten percent of the payment and the discretionary funds. Rain looked like he was going to say something but held his tongue when Brutus laid one of his massive hands on the small human's shoulder. The negotiations concluded, and Mr. Johnson left the room to the runners.

"What was that shit? You're late, and our work gets brushed aside like we're a bunch of fucking kids!" Rain exploded at A.J. Yelling right out of the gate. It was a bad position to negotiate from or against, and A.J. knew that well.

"Do I ask to get behind your scope and do your job?" A.J. started out calmly, going with a tactful but unremorseful approach.

"No. Because you fucking couldn't," Rain yelled again, "I was pushing for half a million, and he was smiling. He would have gone higher."

"He started at one fifty and you asked for a half million? Would you like to know why he was smiling? He knew you had no idea what you were doing, and when all was said and done you'd have probably been lucky to walk out with one, if you even got the job." A.J. had done it plenty of times. Come in offering more, then got so pissed at the inept negotiator he convinced the gangers to take less money. It was gangers, he understood, but Rain was a ganger made good with some discipline and training from the UCAS Army.

"Is that fucking right? It's A.J. to the rescue again. Come to help the poor dumb streeters," Rain wasn't yelling now, but instead he was walking toward him with the strut he used when he was spoiling for a fight.

When Rain got within arm's reach, A.J. activated his reflex enhancements, stepped forward, and planted a solid palm into Rain's solar plexus. Air rushed from the surprised man's lungs as he fell to his knees clutching his chest and gasping for air. Brutus was already in motion to make sure A.J. didn't go too far, but it wasn't necessary.

A.J. raised a hand up to Brutus and leaned down to Rain's ear and whispered, "You joined a gang because you didn't like your family. I joined a gang because I didn't like not having a family. Don't try and do my job, I won't do yours. Square, chummer?"

The noise Rain made and the head nod were enough. A.J. looked at the rest of the team, called a midnight meeting at Rain's doss, and then walked out of the room.

As he strolled back into the bar, he was reminded of what now was a conflicting date. He was a quick thinker most of the time and came up with a great idea that would only cost him a little more money and a few other favors, including one with Cheri, the owner of the Maiden. He slipped up to the bar, waved over Cammy, and told her to pack a bag on Wednesday. She was going to Boston for the weekend.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ADVENTURES

This and the next three chapters contain plot outlines and other resources for adventures set in the events of *Lockdown*. Sections of these chapters include **What's Up, Chummer**, which provides the general outline of what happens in the chapter; **Tell It to Them Straight**, which contains material that can be read directly to players to set up the adventure; **Behind the Scenes**, which provides information gamemasters need to run the adventure; **Characters** and **Locations** have resources that can be used in the adventure; and **Picking Up the Pieces** helps wrap things up. In short, it has all you need to leap into *Lockdown* craziness. Go get 'em!

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

In order to get involved in what's going down in Boston, runners have to get there. This initial adventure is one way of doing such. The runners will be hired by a fixer representing a local corporate executive. The executive is from Ares for this adventure, and the main locations described are in Seattle. The team is hired to track down the executive's son. If the gamemaster prefers, the runners can be from any city and be hired by any corporation in place of Ares, or the Ares executive can simply be moved to your preferred city. Also, gamemasters can change the relationship to daughter, wife, father, etc., to better fit their group.

The runners' search at the executive's home leads to evidence that the son was flown out of the city and taken to Boston. As the runners' job is to track him down, they will need to travel to Boston.

The first hindrance to their investigation in Boston is traffic and transportation. The runners should arrive on the day of the lab incident (June 4th) that causes the quarantine. The quarantine has a staggered start and doesn't start becoming a full lockdown until the evening of the 5th. Before that point, the Cambridge area and Fenway get cordoned off, then Downtown. Early on the 5th, flights out get canceled but planes are still allowed to land, trains are only coming in early in the day and are then stopped completely, road traffic is slowed and

rerouted, and boats are allowed to enter the harbor, but no one leaves. This clogs up areas and creates a mix of paranoia, fear, happiness (day off work), and indifference. (See the *Lockdown Timeline*, p. 68, for other events that could be interesting in your story.)

The trail in Boston leads from the airport, around (or through) downtown depending on whether it's cordoned off yet, down into the Rox, and then south to a NeoNET Blue Hills Complex right near the edge of what will be the Quarantine Zone.

Security at the facility is thin, and the southern portion of the facility is barren. It may look like a nice entry point, but the guards to the south will send spirits to warn them and possibly attack them. The runners should be able to get in, recover the young man, and get out.

When they contact the Ares exec, the connection is terrible, and the exec is barely able to tell them to get his son to the Knight Errant station in Revere (this can be another security firm's office if using another corporation). He's working to pull strings to get the kid out and promises the runners an exit as well, but it will cost them some of their pay.

In the end no one is getting out, but the runners will get in contact with a good initial source of work in Boston, KE detective D.J. McCarthy. Welcome to the Lockdown!

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

TAKING A CALL FROM THE WELL-KNOWN FIXER

The runners are contacted around 18:00 hours on Tuesday, June 2, by a well-known fixer named Bach. (Dates and times are very important to track and maintain in this storyline if you desire a sense of continuity with the rest of the events of *Lockdown*; see p. 68). He offers to meet at 21:00 that same evening. He has a reputation for solid jobs, mostly sponsored by Ares or an Ares subsidiary. He's basically a corporate fixer but doesn't actually work for Ares directly—deniability and all that. He invites them out for drinks at the Alabaster Maiden, saying he has a job and someone he would like the runners to meet. He's offering money up front for guaranteed work and promises the job will be worth their while. If questioned he says that the employer isn't in the mood to shop around. He wants a team and he wants them now. The up front money is 1,500 nuyen for each runner.

MEETING MR. JOHNSON

When the runners go to the Alabaster Maiden (see Locations, p. 158, for details), they get the usual quiet back room, a few free drinks, some hors d'oeuvres, and polite conversation before the real business takes place. Bach is there for the initial introductions and the arrival and introduction of Jan Wagner (pronounced Yon Vogner), Ares Seattle Executive Vice President of Contracts and Acquisitions. Wagner isn't a corporate Johnson, but his area of employment uses them frequently enough that he knows how to work with them.

Wagner dismisses Bach and gets right to business. He offers the runner team 5,000 nuyen per day to investigate the disappearance of his son, Aiden, with the goal of finding and recovering him. The return of his son alive and in good health will get the runners a 50,000-nuyen bonus; alive but damaged in some way will be 25,000 nuyen; and dead will still get them 10,000 nuyen. Runners can negotiate the per-day sum with a standard Negotiation Opposed Test, with each net hit worth 500 nuyen per day. The recovery sums are non-negotiable.

TAKING THE JOB

Wagner believes the disappearance was a kidnapping, but no ransom demands have been sent and he's not waiting for the trail to get cold. He gives the runners a burner commlink with a programmed number they can use to reach him. He says to limit unplanned communications to important issues but to contact him each day at 07:45 with an update and to receive the day's payment. He gives the team a certified credstick with 5,000 nuyen on it for the first day. If the runners negotiated the amount up, he says the missing funds will be added to the next payment in the morning.

HOOKS

He opens up for questions after that and can provide the following useful info:

- Aiden was dropped off at the Aurelius Academy this morning by his driver at 07:43.
- He checked into the school at 07:55, was marked present for all his classes, and checked out of the school at 15:50.
- The driver arrived at the school at 15:45 and waited until 16:00 before going into the school to ask about Aiden's whereabouts.
- Initial investigations have already determined that he disappeared between third and fourth periods (at apprximately 10:55-11:00).
- No one in the school noticed anything strange. There's nothing suspicious on the video footage; the digital info was likely tampered with.
- Security at the school is provided by Knight Errant. They have two officers stationed on site. Neither saw anything out of the ordinary.
- Wagner has one fake SIN (Rating 6) to provide a single runner with an ID as an Ares Special Investigator in case they want to check anything that KE has done already.

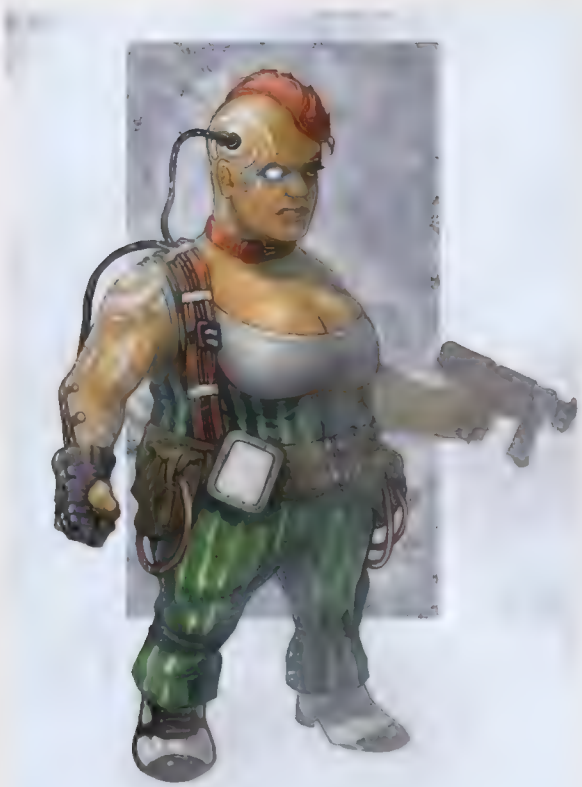
When the meeting is over, he tells the runners they have the room until 22:00 hours.

BEHIND THE SCENES

INVESTIGATING SEATTLE

The investigation in Seattle isn't easy. The group that did the job are pros and know how to cover their tracks from the police, but runners can use avenues that normal law enforcement cannot. A series of small events occur as the runners investigate.

The fake SIN will get them into the Aurelius Academy, allow them to request records, and question teachers and staff. If this is done right, the runners should get their first clue. If it's done wrong, the runners will get attacked, but they will still obtain their first good clue.



The kidnapping occurred in the school as Aiden was moving through the hallways between periods. The kidnappers are a team contracted through NeoNET consisting mostly of cyborg technomancers, or cytechs, along with a local mage by the name of Alicia Evankowski, a.k.a., Summer. The local mage is the weakest link in keeping the plan quiet, but she's no rookie. She works full-time as a wage mage for NeoNET but moonlights as a runner.

Summer performed much of the early legwork of the job, chatting up, flirting with, and doing whatever she needed to with both KE guards assigned to the school as well as a member of the janitorial staff. She spent a week getting details on the school and its workday while working subtle suggestions into her new friends' heads that led to her smooth entry and exit of the building.

The kidnapping happened like this:

At 10:07, Cody Lindberg, the janitor, stepped out to smoke a nicstick, a habit he had quit almost a year earlier (relapsing was one of Summer's subtle suggestions). He walked off the campus to smoke, since smoking on campus is prohibited. He opened the side gate for only a few seconds coming in and out but Summer, hidden beneath a pair of spells (Silence and Improved Invisibility) and a spirit power (Concealment) followed him back in on his return. Inside the school she stayed hidden and cast an Influence spell on Aiden, giving him an urge to urinate right near the end of class. Using another spell on Ashton Jones, a KE guard, she got him to open the door for the bathroom where she waited for Aiden. Once Aiden was in the washroom she had the spirit use its concealment power on the young man, hit him with a tranq patch, and waited for Cody to do his bathroom-cleaning rounds during fourth period. When he entered, she slipped out with Aiden and headed to the front-door guard post where Jackson Delmont, the other KE guard, was exiting in order to do his check of the grounds. She followed him out, slipped out the gate while he opened it to check the external perimeter, and was home free.

Meanwhile the cytech team changed records and intercepted attendance recordings to make it seem like Aiden was there for the rest of the day. After logging him out of school for the day, they scrubbed the school's records of their presence. After they had Aiden in their possession, the group returned to Summer's runner doss, staying for only six hours before booking a private red-eye flight from Seattle to Boston and taking the drugged young man across the continent. They are actually on their way to the airport when Wagner hires the runners.

The runners can go to the school in the morning and start investigating. If they ask the right questions or make the right rolls, they will be led to Delmont, Lindberg, and Jones. All of them recently began relationships with someone new, though Lindberg hides that fact since he is married. Lindberg went out for the strange nicstick smoke after having quit long before and Jones left his normal post to go urinate, though he radioed in first. The edited video footage also shows one issue when Aiden moves from third to fourth period; he stops in the restroom but reappears without walking out. The footage for the day was edited from earlier footage, and perceptive runners may also notice subtle changes between classes. Changes include a dif-

ferent backpack, a shoe suddenly being tied that was untied, hair a different length or styled a little different, maybe a pin on a lapel that appears and disappears, etc.

Feel free to fill this section with some good roleplaying opportunities and adding some false trails with nervous teachers and staff who are worried about their jobs or are doing other things wrong that they don't want anyone to know about. Play out the conversation with the three suspects and let the players find the problems with their stories.

While performing an investigation in public, the runners cannot pull any improper tactics, but once they have a few suspects they are more than likely going to do some private questioning. The three best subjects leave the school at different times and head home in different routes, giving more clues as they leave.

Lindberg leaves the school at 16:30. He walks to the bus stop and takes a series of buses to his apartment in Snohomish. While on the bus he makes a call to Summer to see if she is free that night and gets a recording. He leaves a long message about being interested in seeing her tonight and that he was reminded of her when he caught a brief whiff of her perfume today at the school. When she doesn't call back in ten minutes he makes another call talking about how rough his day was and how much he'd really like to see her tonight instead of going home to his slitch of a wife. He calls again at the thirty-minute mark and says he's just wondering if maybe she got home and hasn't checked the messages yet. At 18:05, Lindberg calls Summer one more time to say he's almost home but could tell his wife he had to stay late at work if Summer is up for a movie or something.

If the runners go to Lindberg's home, they can find his wife, Erica, entertaining a guest from 12:00 hours until around 18:00 hours. The guest is a coworker—it seems Cody isn't the only member of this marriage looking for something more. At 18:10, the guest leaves and walks right past Cody as he comes into the building.

Both of the Knight Errant guards get off duty at 19:00. Jones walks to the bus stop and takes a series of buses to get to Renton. He makes a call to Summer as soon as he is on the bus and also gets the voicemail. He leaves a rather detailed message about another go with the nightstick and cuffs, saying he really enjoyed it the last time. There is no one at his apartment in Renton, and when he gets home he orders some heavily silicon-enhanced films and spends the evening with his nightstick alone.

Delmont takes his motorcycle from the lot, rides to Bellevue, and drives past Summer's home. He knows where she lives because he once followed her home. Because he is a creep. He sees her light on and heads up, flashing his badge to another person living in the apartment complex to gain admittance in. Summer is there and is surprised to see him—she's actually packing, since she figures this place is no good for her anymore. She plays like she's happy but tries to get him to leave. He gets suspicious and pushes his way in. With the KE investigation going on, Summer doesn't need to blow her cover by beating his hoop, so she plays it meek. Delmont sees messages on her commlink and activates them to hear the voice of the janitor first. Then he hears the other KE guard. He goes ballistic and starts hitting her. She isn't expecting that and gets knocked flat, and while casting a spell at him she knocks both of them out. The runners can interfere in this at any time or let it play out.

If the runners show up in the apartment, Summer continues to play dumb, trying to get them to leave, even threatening to call the police. There is still evidence of Aiden being there if they look around. The kidnappers changed his hair color, and there's a box from some dye that doesn't match her blond locks. His clothes are still sitting on the floor in the bedroom; Summer hasn't grabbed them yet in her hurry to pack up her own belongings. On top of that, his commlink is sitting on her kitchen table. The commlink is turned off, but it seems suspicious that she has multiple devices. That's common for runners, not so much for regular folks. On top of that, one of them is a fairly rare (and expensive) model that looks like the commlink worn by Ares action trid star, Flint Steel, in his latest hit, *Steel Justice*. If the runners get physical or threaten to get physical and she believes them, Summer will become conciliatory in an effort to save herself. She'll reveal that she worked with a team that took Aiden out of town the night before. She won't offer details on the team unless pushed hard (they're a scary lot) and will only go so far as saying they were all heavily cybered technomancers. She knows they were all cyborg technomancers, but she isn't willing to reveal that much insider info from NeoNET.

Whether through tracking down the calls, interrogating one of the suspects, or following the KE guard and getting suspicious, the runners can find Summer. They can ask her a few pointed questions to discover who hired her and where they took Aiden. They are still at least twenty-four hours behind the rest of the group and will need to get to Boston if they want to claim more than their single day of wages.

If the runners don't get any of the clues, they get a visit by Summer and another runner team looking to chase them off the case. Summer is the only real pro in the crew, so the fight shouldn't be too tough and should leave the runners with a good bit of leverage over her. She'll then offer the runners info on Aiden in exchange for her freedom.

BOSTON MADHOUSE

Arrival in Boston should occur sometime on June 4th. If the runners are in the air around 19:00 hours local time (Boston is three hours later than Seattle), they may be able to see the dragon attacking the NeoNET towers as they come in for a landing. They may also get an announcement that their landing will be delayed. If they

fly in any other time, it's just another plane landing.

How this scene feels depends a lot on when the runners arrive in Boston. During the day, life in Beantown is normal. Downtown is busy, the outlying areas aren't busy but they aren't empty. It's a bustling city. As evening comes on, downtown becomes nightlife-crowded instead of business-crowded, while the surrounding areas become after-workday busy with people out and about on errands and living normal life. It doesn't get weird until the evening.

Around 19:00 hours (18:57 hours to be exact), Eliohann/Cerberus/Deus escapes the lab at MIT&T and flies toward downtown. A few minutes later the dragon battle over the city occurs. After these events, the Hub gets packed as people head out to see what's going on and generally gape in awe at the strange iridescent falling rain. More people pour into downtown trying to see if they can get a look at the dragons, the damage to Fenway, or the strange rain. The outlying areas become filled with gossip and rumors about what happened downtown, and a lot of people plan trips to the city. The area around the lab at MIT&T in Cambridge gets immediately cordoned off. By 01:00 hours on the 5th, most of Cambridge is closed off, including the bridges, making travel rough as traffic diverts around it.

Luckily the runners' investigation here isn't headed for Cambridge. The two best places to look for info on shadow activities in Boston are the Catacombs and the Rox. In the Catacombs, primarily the section below the Hub, they can buy information from Mama's Boyz. Mama's Boyz will tell the runners about a lot of out-of-town kidnapping victims being run down to a NeoNET facility down south by I-93. If they ask specifically about cybered-up technomancers, the runners will get directed there and to the former East Coast Stock Exchange building. Rumors abound about this place having technomancers.

In the Rox, the runners can get information similar to the above from three different sources: the Morelli Mafia family, the Roxx street gang, and the Hellriders go-gang. Each source of info raises different issues down the line for the runners.

If the runners get the info from the Morellis, the mobsters call ahead to warn NeoNET the runners are on their way. The security at the facility (what little there is right now) will be on the lookout and ready for the runners when they arrive. The Morellis won't mention activities at the former ECSE. They have no desire to anger whoever is running the show at that creepy place.

If the runners get the info from the Roxx, the gang offers to provide a little distraction for the runners as long as they don't mind the gang grabbing themselves a little something while they're there. Even if the runners don't take the offer, the Roxx head down that way to be ready when the runners go in. The Roxx gangers also mention nothing about the former ECSE, mainly because they don't know. They're mainly a Roxx gang and keep tabs on the area of Boston around them, not the Hub.

If the runners get the info from the Hellriders, they get a little distraction support. The Hellriders will cruise I-93 for the runners and make a lot of noise to draw the attention of security in the direction of the gang. If the runners are going after the facility on the evening of the 6th, it's very important to know when; see Event 3 for details.

BLUE HILL RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FACILITY:

NeoNET's Blue Hill Research and Development Facility (see **Locations**, p. xx) is south of the Rox, located just north of I-93. I-93 down here will soon be the end of the quarantine zone. At 0000 hours on the morning of the 6th, the quarantine goes into effect, but this area has had ground forces around since 0500 on the 5th, when the UCAS National Guard forces came in for their lockdown assistance and "drill."

If the runners try an approach from any direction but the north, they run across National Guard forces. The National Guard soldiers will announce that they're running a full lockdown drill, have full arrest authority, and will detain anyone who tries to pass the roadblocks. Any violence will be met with an overwhelming response of non-lethal force, including spirits, drones armed with gel rounds, and soldiers using gel rounds in their rifles and Stick 'n' Shock ammo in their shotguns.

The description of the NeoNET Blue Hills Research and Development Facility, including security, is in **Locations** (p. 159). Aiden and six other technomancers are being held in the main lab building. Each one is held in a separate lab containment facility, and they are not allowed to interact. Tests are being run on each one independently to learn the effects of various things on their different technomancer abilities. The data on their computer system could become some sweet paydata for another corp. Freeing the other technos could get the runners some good contacts in the city, but it won't be easy. Brief descriptions of the technos are located in the sidebar.

The former East Coast Stock Exchange is not where Aiden is, and from the outside it doesn't look like anyone is there. This is actually the home to some Mitsuhama Computer Technologies facilities. They perform clandestine technomancer testing here, some of it very unusual and rather disturbing. MCT is performing experiments to study the effects of Dissonance on technomancers. Their research facilities are in the underground labs. The upper floors that once held the offices and main floor of the ECSE are abandoned, inhabited only by rats.

The only business in the building is a medium-sized restaurant, Exchange Foods, specializing in classic American food (burgers, fries, hot dogs, etc.). They do a brisk business, and the rear of the restaurant looks out through windows on the old ECSE floor. It is dilapidated and creepy in the real world, but the restaurant runs an AR overlay of the place in its heyday. Some people

NEONET BLUE HILLS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER TECHNOMANCERS

CAROLYN TUTKO, FEMALE, ELF, 25, 1.78 METERS, BLUE EYES, BLACK HAIR

Queen Tut to her friends, Carolyn is a brash and sassy young woman. At least she was until eight months ago. She has undergone testing to analyze the effects of various substances on her technomancer abilities and has actually become addicted to quite a few. She is no longer brash and sassy and is instead tame and meek. She begs anyone who comes to see or feed her for more of the various drugs they have used on her. Her abilities have begun to fade as she spends most of her time seeking a fix instead of honing her skills.

Two of the standard guards in the facility frequently feed her addiction in exchange for certain favors that she performs with zeal and excitement, especially if they give her a dose of bliss before. When she has lucid moments she hates herself, her addiction, her fading, and the guards that abuse her fragile state.

AMANDA FREESTON, FEMALE, HUMAN, 26, 1.55 METERS, GREEN EYES, BROWN HAIR

"Amanda Panda" to her friends, she is no cute and cuddly bear. In fact, in here she is referred to as the Grizzly due to her ferocious temper and nasty disposition. She didn't start that way but has been the subject of tests involving exposure to virus and malware-infested electronics. The limited exposure to this badly damaged code has made her more aggressive since her arrival in the program four months ago.

She has been secretly infusing every piece of electronics they give her with a sprite in hopes of getting them outside to tell others where she is, but her plan has been unsuccessful thus far.

NATHAN PROUDFOOT, MALE, ORK, 20, 2.02 METERS, BROWN EYES, BLACK HAIR

A Cascade Ork by birth, Proudfoot felt shunned by his tribe after he discovered his abilities. The truth is they never knew and were instead shunning him for his distant and strange behavior. He left the tribe and started to wander east, eventually getting snagged by NeoNET cytechs in Denver just before the recent craziness. He's been in the program for thirteen months and has faced isolation tests, virtual arena combat with AIs and IC, and electroshock therapy.

He has actually increased his talents and feels close to his first Deep Resonance submersion. If the testers find out, though, he will be eliminated. They have no way of controlling him if he has access to the Deep Resonance and could possibly connect to others through the Resonance Realms. He tries to play weak, but they keep pushing him, and he finds it difficult to fail intentionally.

SCOTT BINGAMAN, MALE, TROLL, 27, 2.61 METERS, BLUE EYES, BROWN HAIR

Scotty B is the researchers' favorite subject. His naturally powerful troll physique has been capable of withstanding a lot of different physical abuse tests, but his mind does not stand up as well to assault. It is an interesting shift in the norm for technomancers, who are frequently physically weak and mentally strong. He has not faired well with the most recent barrage of mental exhaustion tests and is rapidly approaching an almost feral state.

If the runners free him, he will run from the containment area, begin tearing up the lab, and then collapse from exhaustion.

LAMARCUS HARRIS, MALE, HUMAN, 21, 1.88 METERS, BROWN EYES, BLACK HAIR

"The Witness," as he was known on the streets, has only been in the program for one month. He specialized in surveillance and would frequently turn in videos of crimes to various police organizations around the world, marked with his distinctive "eyewitness" view that looked like it was filmed through a human eye. It was his technique of using his technomancer abilities to record his own vision that eventually drew the attention of Minuteman Security, then NeoNET, who sent the cytechs.

Harris is a dangerous subject and is getting more dangerous by the day. He's infected with the CFD virus. As the tests performed on him weaken his will, the virus gains more and more control. If the virus takes over it will not have any regrets infecting others in order to help it escape, which is a very dangerous prospect down here in the confines of the labs.

He is currently being subjected to various toxins and chemical compounds. His heightened tolerance has the scientists very curious as to how he is doing it.

BILLY JO TESTER, FEMALE, DWARF, 29, 1.10 METERS, BLUE EYES, BLONDE HAIR

BJ is not the best nickname for an attractive, sub-four foot blond, but at the age of sixteen she made the slur work in her favor. She'd ask those who giggled if they wanted to know what BJ really stood for, usually with a cute little smile and a wink. Then she'd give them a fast uppercut to the groin. While they mewled on the ground clutching their manhood, she'd giggle, give them a little smile, and say "ball jacker." Her hacking style was much the same once she Emerged, and she'd gladly do some hooding against those who found it funny to pick on others for whatever reason. Eventually, one of those she helped got into a bad situation with the mob and sold out "this technomancer freak they know," so the cytechs came for her.

She's been in the project for four months and has already punched half the staff in the balls. They now only take her out in full shackles or let her perform her technomancer exercises in full VR then go run tests on her unconscious form. Her nasty ball-smashing habit gained her the attention of one of the female scientists who happens to prefer the company of women. The two are growing close, and Billy Jo is close to getting an escape route. If the runners free her, the scientist will ask them to take both of them out and will offer them 3,452.56 nuyen, her entire bank account at the moment.

come for the tourist value, others come to see loved ones lost to the Crash that are part of the AR feed, while still others come for good food. The restaurant is the cover that allows deliveries to arrive at the building and keeps down suspicion about why supplies get delivered to an empty building.

The lower floors are below the earth and the elevator down is warded (Force 8). The main and upper floors have watcher spirits patrolling to warn the security staff of intrusions. Security on the main floor is handled by a pair of MCT Iron Dragon drones (modified Steel Lynx, p. 227) that respond to calls and warnings from the agent program monitoring the cameras and the four Dragonfly drones patrolling each of the first three floors. Above that there is nothing but watcher spirits on the astral.

Runners that come here should get a feeling that this place is not empty but that it might be a little out of their weight-class. Security down in the labs consists of two MCT Arcane Security Specialists (p. 221), eight MCT/Petrovski Security Officers (p. 221), two MCT Security Riggers (p. 222), two MCT Electronic Security Specialists (p. 221), and six MCT/Petrovski Security Special Response Officers (p. 222). Half of these people are on duty. The other half are off duty but in the facility to respond to emergencies. This security detail understands the value of their project and will kill or detain anyone who infiltrates their facility. Runners who are killed or captured are likely out for this operation but not out for good (see **It's a Wrap**, p. 161).

CHARACTERS

AIDEN WAGNER

(KE/RUNNER)

Aiden is seventeen years old and was born and raised as an Ares corpkid. He's faithful to the company and plans to work his way up to and beyond his father someday but is looking to do it in a different division. Right now he's focused on his schooling, marksmanship, and martial trainings. He's stayed away from sports since they take away from his other practices, but he competes in the company's biannual Ares Combat Co-op and the competition that ends the week long course each year.

He isn't cowed easily and can handle himself in an up-and-up fight, but he's no combat vet. He's personable but has a little bit of a tough-guy attitude that comes from his Ares arrogance. He'll be a little down on himself for getting rescued instead of escaping, but he has been kept drugged or unconscious, and that will eventually make him feel like he was so much of a threat they had to keep him out.

JAN WAGNER

(ARES SEATTLE VP OF CONTRACTS AND ACQUISITIONS)

Wagner has been working for Ares for over thirty years, and in his time there he's built up a solid rep and developed extensive connections within the entire megacorp. He's not a corporate Johnson or a fixer; he really is an executive. However, his division, Contracts and Acquisitions, uses runners all the time to soften targets, drop property values, incriminate targets to force them into selling, gather blackmail material, perform assassinations, and a whole lot more. His moral code is bent toward the profits of Ares.

He owns several homes around the world, has an abundant array of contacts within the megacorporation, and would be a great contact or ally for any shadowrunner with big aspirations. Saving his son will definitely put the runners on his good side.

LOCATIONS

THE ALABASTER MAIDEN

EAST MERCER STREET & 12TH AVENUE, SEATTLE METROPLEX, UCAS

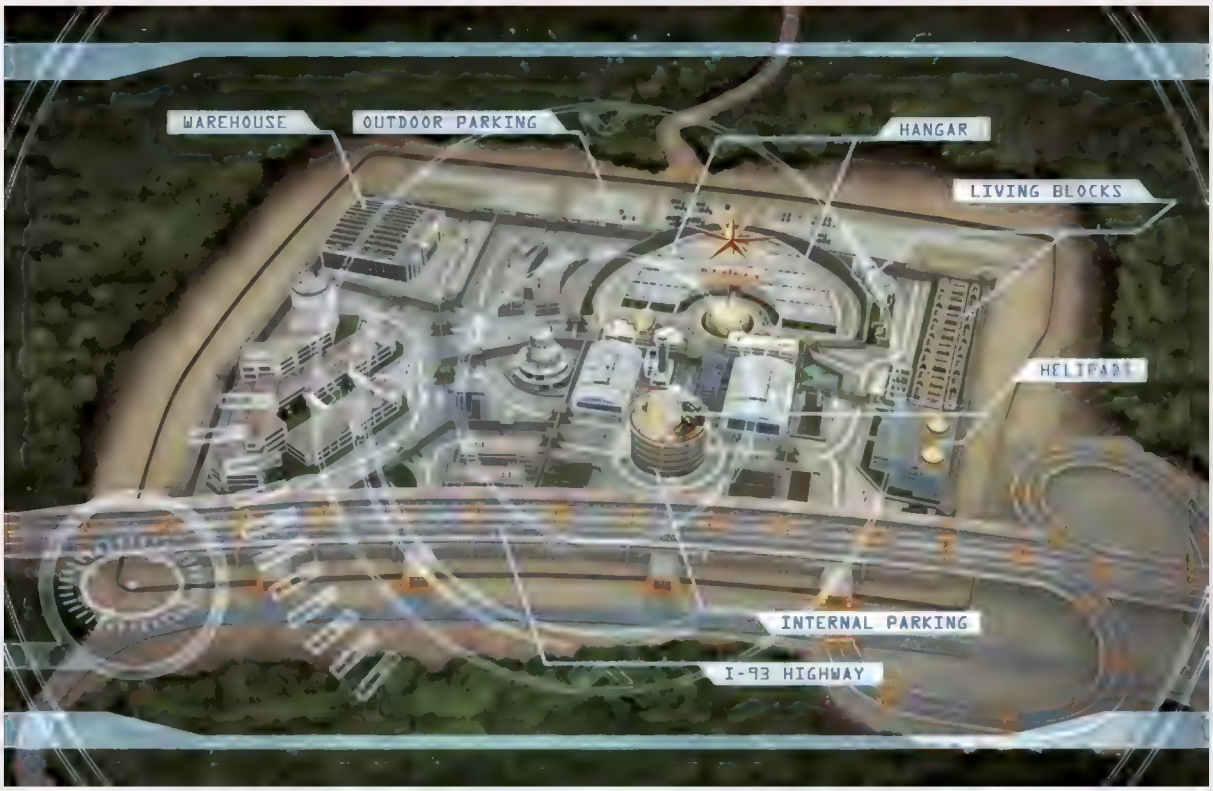
This place is one of Seattle's most popular nightclubs. It's named for the strange statue that stands outside the club. The life-size white stone statue of a beautiful woman is said to be all that remains of Gabriella Dematto, one of the area's first magicians. As the tale goes, Ms. Dematto, menaced by a gang, overreached her magical talents and the resulting backlash left her petrified. Her statue passed through various owners before it ended up outside the club, where it has remained for decades. The Maiden's current owner is an elf named Cheri Ostler. Visitors to the club regularly touch the statue on their way in and on their way out for good luck.

Inside, the Alabaster Maiden is a high-class nightclub with the latest in dance music and holographic light shows. Magical acts sometimes appear on weekends and specialize in a lot of physical illusion spells so the clubs virtual visitors can enjoy them as well.

AURELIUS ACADEMY

Corporate schools are commonplace for all the megacorporations but with all those citizens to educate they still run a rather run-of-the-mill curriculum that often doesn't suit the educational desires of the elite. For those more discerning and wealthy (tuition is 75,000 nuyen per year) parents, there are places like Aurelius Academy.

Aurelius is located in the northern section of Downtown Seattle along the shores of Lake Washington. The school acts as a college preparatory high school with an advanced curriculum focusing on business manage-



ment. The school only admits 125 students per grade level, giving the whole school only 500 students. With so many wealthy people's kids at the academy, security at the school is tight and run by Knight Errant.

NEONET BLUE HILLS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

This facility is one of the largest NeoNET research facilities in the Boston region. Built on what was once a nature preserve but long ago sold off to the struggling government, the sprawling complex is surrounded by nature. The complex consists of more than fifty buildings separated by fences and walls. Many of the staff members live in the housing facilities on the compound, but some commute in.

There are eight gates, each with their own guard station, that allow access to the complex—four along the north fences and four along the I-93 wall. Entry through each gate is limited to the area of the compound nearest it, and employees are not allowed entrance through the wrong gates. The southern side of the compound is marked by the raised road of I-93. The highway has a wall built beneath with the four gates mentioned above, and the upper part of the road has a two-meter wall that runs the entire length of the compound that blocks the view from the road and prevents cars from driving off the road and falling into the compounds buildings that are near the south end.

Research from all facets of NeoNET's interests and subdivisions go on here. The largest block of buildings belong to NeoNET subsidiary, and former AAA megacorp, Novatech. Projects run the gamut as well. In one building Erika may be working on a new cutting-edge cyberdeck, while the next is Mindstorm Neurotechnologies looking to implant new headware into paracritters.

During the quarantine the southern section of the compound is externally abandoned. Buildings with underground access, which is most of them, are still in use but no one walks the grounds for fear of being shot at by the drones on the border. The northern side of the compound is frequently under attack and they usually shoot first and don't bother asking questions of anyone approaching.

They don't seem to be on the grid but the truth is they are running jammers that they only turn off to send messages to the NeoNET Towers. They have suffered from a lot of new Head Case cyber attacks and now hide in their shell from the assaults.

FORMER EAST COAST STOCK EXCHANGE

An icon of modern Boston without the grandiose and ridiculous heights gone to by many of the megacorps

in town, the former ECSE building is a marvel both inside and out. The outside view of the building gives a feeling similar to the old European churches with flying buttresses and gothic architecture complete with gargoyles and jagged spires. The deep stone grey of the structure contrasts starkly with the glass and steel that surrounds it but that was the intention. It feels rooted and strong.

Inside, the building is as modern as any of its fellows, or at least it was up until 10 years ago. The building was never upgraded post Crash and lacks wireless functionality over most of the structure. The ground floor houses the former exchange floor, which is no longer in use, and a restaurant, Exchange Foods. The restaurant is the only business actually registered at the address. All the upper floors are empty offices and they really are empty. The stock exchange floor is visible through large windows at the rear of the restaurant and the restaurant operates an AR glass display that shows the hustle and bustle of the the heyday of the exchange.

The building is owned by Mitsuhama Computer Technologies and they operate the restaurant as well as the subterranean offices where they have secret labs that perform experiments on technomancers relating to Dissonance. The building has 6 subfloors with different labs on floors 3-6, while security and housing take up floors 1 and 2. All the staff live in the building and transfers and deliveries are snuck in through the restaurants deliveries. A pair of elevators access the lower floors but require physical passkeys to use.

The building is monitored by the security from downstairs but is patrolled by custom drones that stalk the ground floor unseen due to their ruthenium coating.

Since the eruption of violence in the Hub, the building has had no attacks at or near it. This is because of the Dissonance in the area and the effect it has on keeping Head Cases away.

KNIGHT ERRANT STATION: REVERE

The station in Revere isn't much different than the other KE stations in the region. It has all the normal features of the rest but also houses a Fast Response Team and a Special Investigations office. This is the home office of Detective McCarthy for the events here and a strongpoint for Knight Errant when the quarantine starts.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Regardless of when they grab Aiden, the runners are going to have trouble when they call in to tell dad he's in their hands. The call will have a very poor connection and is only making it out of the QZ because the phone runs through a dedicated connection to the Ares grid, which isn't down yet.

Wagner will tell the runners to get his son to the Knight Errant Station in Revere. He'll be arranging departure for the entire group from there. He wires the runners half of their recovery fee right away and says the rest will come when they get to the Revere station.

The problems that come now are numerous. They have a lot of ground to cover and people are starting to riot in the south. Head cases are going crazy in the Hub, with rioters trying to revolt and escape the growing dangers. Knight Errant is trying to keep the peace, but they are being overwhelmed by rioters and infected by head cases. Plus, all byways are starting to flow poorly; ships being held in the harbor and rivers are at a standstill, while highways and roads are clogged by abandoned and wrecked cars. Meanwhile, roving go-gangs revel in the anarchy.

At the Revere KE Station the runners are going to need to talk their way past the door or sneak in somehow. It is currently under siege by rioters looking for answers and members of the Wicked gang hovering at the outskirts waiting for an excuse to help the rioters storm the place.

When the runners get inside, the bad news piles up. They can use the commlink for one last phone call where Wagner asks to talk to his son and then the runners. The son starts to cry on the phone, tells his dad that he'll be fine, and tries to sound tough and together, but the runners can see the truth. When the runners get the commlink back, Wagner sends them the rest of their payment, in full, and apologizes for being unable to get them out. He makes another plea that he will pay their team 1,000 nuyen per day if they will protect his son and keep him safe inside the QZ. He isn't sure when he'll be able to make payments, but he assures the runners he is a man of his word. Then the commlink goes dead.

The runners have a decision to make at that point. Do they take the kid under their wing, let him play in the shadows with them and maybe join them in trying to escape the QZ, or do they leave him at the KE precinct for them to take care of him? Aiden is actually more comfortable joining the runners and pleads for that option. He has seen how overwhelmed the KE precinct and all the officers are and feels safe with the runners since they saved him.

IT'S A WRAP

WORKING FOR THE MCT

If the runners are captured or knocked out inside the former East Coast Stock Exchange building, they are taken into Mitsuhama custody. With all the craziness that is starting to happen downtown, they aren't about to waste useful resources like a team of runners. The runners spend a few days in the facility while MCT medics tend to their wounds. No one talks to them during this time. After two days of the silent treatment, the runners are brought into a meeting.

The team should be surprised to be alive, since this is an MCT facility and they are famous for their zero-zone policy. The runners get an offer they would be stupid to refuse since that would mean death. The MCT facility is safe but in the middle of a very dangerous place. A fairly shaky young scientist who the runners will know is not in charge delivers the offer. He is willing to answer questions and in doing so calms a bit as he feels the runners are taking the deal (whether they plan to or not). He will inform the runners of the events of the quarantine up to now, which can be around 2300 hours on June 8th. The offer is simple: take employment with the MCT security detail as Special Operations.

MCT offers human runners a salary of 1,500 nuyen per week and metahuman runners 1,000 nuyen per week. They will need to follow orders and do as the security force requests, and they will get paid each week after the work is done. The contract lasts until MCT decides to release them or they violate it in some way. MCT requires only one other thing from them, and that is their silence on the lab, its location, and the activities going on there.

Runners can now get assignments from MCT to go out and get supplies, do investigations, or sabotage other corps. They can also go out on the first job and never return. MCT will leave them alone as long as they never tell anyone about the labs. If the runners break that rule, MCT will come after them with the merciless precision they are known for. The runners will learn why you keep your word when you make promises to keep a secret for a megacorp.

TAKING CARE OF AIDEN

Runners who take Aiden under their wing get a seventeen-year-old human, raised in the Ares combat culture, who has some "violence solves everything" mentality but lacks the full ruthlessness to back that up on the mean streets. He's not completely inept, but he is no match for most runners. This sequel is less of a specific adventure and more of a series of issues they will have in order to help the young man survive.

Once the local grid is locked tight and the big corp grids come back online, the runners get a request for proof of Aiden's health. They are then paid for all the days he has been with them and the message asks for a dated picture sent to a specific node whenever they can. After each picture is sent, the runners' accounts receive money wired from outside the zone. Any other attempt to communicate to the address sending the messages gets intercepted by GOD, Wagner gets on the GOD watch list, and the money stops coming. The runners then have to decide if they took Aiden to help him or for the cash. If the runners threaten to leave him, Aiden offers to work with them and give them an extra slice of all his cuts on the runs for as long as they want. He thinks he owes them his life and is honorable enough to want to pay that debt back.

AIDING AIDEN

Aiden makes ranks quickly inside KE. He has a lot of insider knowledge on Ares and has lived in the Ares combat culture all his life. He gets noticed by McCarthy, who adds him to his dirty detail since Aiden has already had dealings with runners.

He becomes a contact for the runners to get work from, including taking another crack at the NeoNET facility down south. He's looking to both release the other technomancers there but to also look for information on what's going on. Aiden can also be good for other do-gooder jobs like saving people trapped in head-case-infested areas that KE has written off due to low manpower. The jobs won't pay well, but they will be great for the runners' reputation with KE/Ares and should offer some additional Karma.

TRAINYARD TROUBLES

Sprawled across the cheap, scratchy carpet in the back of the late-model Super Kombi, Rain peeked through the narrowly opened rear hatch and watched the action below. His Sightline Systems electronic binoculars gave him a great view of the battle raging below. It was a good thing, because he didn't care to get any closer to the trainyard.

He was well hidden in the wrecked minivan, and the binoculars had a low-light feature so he could watch the action even at night. His Super Kombi hideout was one of many abandoned vehicles left on the upper deck of I-93 inside the quarantine zone, the QZ. He had chosen this one because he could lay out along the center and look out through the hatch. He had no problem running recon on his own, but he wasn't about to get himself tangled up in these messes without a serious bump in pay.

Currently he was trying to get some solid intel on the fighting that was going on at the MBTA maintenance facility near Columbus Park. The area had been a hotspot for runs from a variety of different sponsors looking to gain control of the facility. It reminded him a little of Desert Wars. Here, instead of highly visible corps, different Johnsons were doing the hiring and using shadowrunners and gangs to fight their battles. There were fewer logos and posturing but just as much bloodshed and violence. Probably more, since in here there were no rules.

From his high vantage he watched a team of six shadowrunners creeping up on the rear of a group of gangers who were themselves creeping up on a group of four other shadowrunners currently in control (albeit loosely) of the main facility. It was going to be ugly for the gangers no matter what, but he had seen this move before. The rear runner team would let the gangers soften the embedded runners and get them to reveal their positions. Then the rear team would start picking off the embedded team and mop up any gangers that happened to run. It was one of the few ways to gain control of the facility without taking a lot of casualties on the way in. Rain had heard rumors that the gangs weren't always hired by Johnsons, they were sometimes hired by the runner teams to act as fodder. Life in the QZ was cruel like that.

In the long run it wouldn't matter. In the past two days, control of the trainyard had changed hands six times. During those six changeovers, only once had he seen anyone make it out of the trainyard alive.

Rain's attention was so focused on the build-up to action below he hadn't even heard the scraping footfalls until he saw the feet walking just outside his hiding spot. Holding his breath he kept still. The shuffling feet bumped the rear door of the minivan. He watched in horror as one side of the short bungee cord he was using to hold the door in place popped free. As the shambling figure rebounded from the car, the door started to rise again. Rain quickly dropped the binoculars and grabbed the door handle with his free hand. He stopped the door before it rebounded too far, but the binoculars tumbled out through the narrow gap and onto the ground.

Holding tight to the door with his right hand, Rain slid his left hand slowly back until he felt the familiar grip of his Ares Predator V. The big pistol felt extra heavy in his off hand, but he couldn't risk a hand switch now. He pulled the big gun up near his head and waited to see how the shambler reacted.

The feet shuffled over towards the fallen binoculars and then stopped. He saw one hand come into view and dangle above the ground flailing slightly. The thing was trying to grab the binoculars but wasn't flexible enough. He imagined the comical sight and even let himself smile slightly. Rain had faced death too many times in his life, likely doubling the number over the last few days, to not smile about it anymore. He was sure he would die, probably sooner rather than later, and figured he might as well die smiling.

The shambler stopped flailing and lowered itself onto a knee. It stumbled and fell to all fours and picked up the binoculars. Rain could see its face as it looked quizzically at the device as if trying to figure out what it was or, more likely, where it had come from. While its gaze was transfixed on the binoculars, Rain pulled the door completely closed. He had to hold it there as the bungee was still in the way of the latch, but at least the thing wouldn't turn and see him hiding inside.

A minute passed that felt like an eternity and Rain heard nothing from outside. He rolled, trying to look out the darkly tinted windows above but couldn't get a good angle. He was off balance and oddly positioned when the tug came on the rear door of the van. It wasn't a hard pull, but it was enough to twist his wrist painful-

ly, causing him to release the handle. The door opened slowly, held in check by pneumatic cylinders meant to help preserve the hinges. Rain hoped they would help preserve his life.

The shambler, a middle-aged human in a blood-stained business suit, was bumped by the rising metal and stumbled back. As the door cleared eye level, the creature spotted Rain. The shambler's hand unclenched the binoculars, sending the fragile piece of equipment falling to the ground, and lunged for Rain's outstretched arm.

As the steel-strong grip of the shambler wrapped around Rain's forearm, he could feel bones bending under the pressure. Pain lanced up his arm but was quickly suppressed by a rush of adrenaline. The big pistol in his left hand no longer felt heavy as he swung it around. He jammed the barrel into the forearm of the shambler and pulled hard on the trigger. The thunderous boom in the small space of the van made Rain's ears ring, but the pressure on his forearm was gone. He saw the shambler stumble back, flailing its bloody stump. It only staggered for a meter before it rebounded off a nearby car and lunged at Rain again. He leveled the Predator and squeezed the trigger again. The round sent the once-human creature stumbling and rebounding again. He fired three more times, until the shambler finally fell to the ground.

Quickly gathering his small cache of supplies from inside the Super Kombi, he looked out the rear door for the binoculars, and saw them sitting in a pool of the shambler's blood. He was reaching for them when he saw the blood creep up the sides of the binoculars. The blood had a strange sheen to it, almost oily. He had seen that sheen before, but he couldn't think of where. He left the binoculars behind with the creeping blood and quickly scooted out the side door. He looked around for more shamblers. When he didn't see any, he started moving for the stairs down to the lower level.

He was almost two kilometers away when it hit him. He suddenly realized why the oily sheen was so familiar. It was the same iridescent sheen as the rain that had fallen on the night of the dragon fight. Whatever had come off that dragon was in the shambler's blood.

He'd been wondering since all this started if the dragon fight, the strange rain, and the quarantine were related; and though it wasn't related to his current assignment, it was probably the best piece of intel he'd gotten in days.

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

This second adventure comes close on the heels of the first, still within the opening week of the quarantine. Though the adventure assumes some measure of success in the first adventure, it can be played as an independent operation for runners from Boston or those who just arrived. It can also be played as the first street-level operation performed for MCT if the runners were captured. Alterations to the Setup phase should make for easy adaptations to any runners' circumstances.

This adventure assumes the runners are (still) up for some work in the QZ. They are contacted by the mob, either because they got info from the Morelli Family in the first adventure or they are simply known to be runners looking for work. The contact is from the O'Rilley Family this time and the runners are invited to a meet with a mid-level soldato with work straight from the Don himself.

The runners get the first little taste of trouble brewing in the underworld when they are waylaid by a group of mobsters from the Morelli family looking to keep them from helping out O'Rilley.

When the runners finally meet with the soldato, he offers them what he claims is a simple job. He wants them to run a gang of geeks out of the trainyard so O'Rilley can move in and gain control of the rails. He doesn't give them any more info because he doesn't have it. O'Rilley knows the truth. It's why he's hiring runners and not sending his brutes. He needs talent, but he doesn't want to pay that much. So he makes it sound like a gang, not the cult of Dissonance-worshipping technomancers it really is.

The runners have to deal with the normal issues of traveling around the QZ. They get a feel for the desperation from a few encounters along the way.

They face a small group of technomancers who have taken control of the trainyard because of the Dis-

sonance Pool that has been created in the yard's automated computer systems. The cult isn't new to the area. They've been here awhile working for MCT with Project Abyss (p. 85) but now have gone independent. They are not truly independent, but are instead working for a familiar face in the world of Dissonance, Pax. She doesn't appear in this adventure, but the runners will definitely get noticed by her after they make contact with her technomancers.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Whether the runners are out looking for work or just trying to hide out in a little hole somewhere to avoid getting infected or killed by the infected, they get a call from an unfamiliar number. The voice on the other side has a thick Boston accent and asks the runners to, "Mate me ate tha Baded Shamerack."

The Beaded Shamrock is a pub in the Rox well known as a hangout for members of the O'Rilley crime family. At the door they're impolitely asked to turn over their weapons, but a red-haired human calls off the bouncers and waves the runners over to his table.

He introduces himself as Shane O'Connor and explains that he's there as a representative for Don Connor O'Rilley. He doesn't spend a lot of time on pleasantries, though he is friendly. Instead he goes directly to offering the runners work. He offers the team 3,000 nuyen apiece to handle a problem the Don is having with a gang in the South Boston trainyards. Runners can negotiate the sum up by 500 nuyen per net hit on an Opposed Negotiation Test (Shane's dice pool is 8), capping at 5,000 nuyen per runner. He's willing to pay 500 nuyen to each runner up front.

He tells the runners that the Don wants the gangers permanently run off. If the runners can scare them bad enough to get them to stay away forever, that's fine. He expects whatever solution they come up with to be permanent.

Shane will tell the runners that the name of the gang in the Discontents and they're mostly a bunch of scrawny geeks, probably hackers. If the runners ask why the Don doesn't just send his own guys, Shane shrugs his shoulders and just asks if they want the job or not. The quarantine activity should make a good cover for any violence that breaks out. Outside of this, he doesn't have much information for the runners.

If the runners played in the first of the adventures in this book and went to the Morellis for information, Shane will be less friendly to them. He may even make a few comments about giving them a chance to fix their rep and work for the real Mafia family in town. He will also start the payment offer at 2,000 nuyen apiece instead.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Before the runners can get to the trainyard and chase off the gang, they are going to need to move through the QZ. The events before the Climax section cover a number of possible events that provide both a challenge to the runners and a chance to interact with the events and mood of the quarantine. As this adventure occurs near the beginning of the quarantine but after the end of the chaotic first forty-eight hours, the moods of the place are starting to shift. Even though it's early, a few people are already settling in for the long haul while most others are still unable to understand or accept what is going on. These sections will cover two encounters to express those different mentalities. An encounter with the dark side of humanity when it feels free of the constraints of society, the early actions of a head case, and a chance to be the hero (well, kind of).

THE DARK SIDE

This encounter brings the runners into contact with those folks inside the QZ who are in survivalist mode. They are out for only themselves and their group. Anyone who enters their neighborhood is assessed from far away as a threat, a source for supplies, or a force to let pass. What the runners look like and how much obvious equipment, supplies, and weapons they are carrying becomes very important as they pass through this neighborhood.

Somewhere between leaving the Rox and reaching the trainyard, the runners pass through a street of four-story row houses. There are sixteen front doors on eight buildings on each side, with the only separation being a narrow one-meter-wide alley just below street level that leads to the small "backyard" areas and the rear balconies. The block looks empty and relatively intact from the far end as they enter, but as they pass further along they realize all is not as it seems. If the runners look like good targets (weak or with a lot of valuable gear visible), the ambush comes when they reach the halfway point of the block. They may get a clue something is amiss if they notice a number of the cars along the street near the middle have bullet holes, broken windows, and other signs of damage that vehicles near the entrance to the block did not have. They may also notice that the lower-floor windows of the center houses are boarded up with narrow slats between the boards. The ambush opens with gunfire from the roofs of the center houses and is joined by gunfire from the slats on the second floor windows.

The front doors on both buildings are all locked, reinforced with furniture, nailed shut, and boarded over, making them very difficult to break through (treat it as Structure Rating 6, Armor Rating 12). All foot traffic from

FOUR CORNERS RESIDENTS

DUNHAM KIRK, HUMAN, MALE, 87 YEARS OLD, OWNER OF FOUR CORNERS THEATRE

Dunham is a long-standing member of the neighborhood's Business Association and has been since before Boston became part of the NEMA. He was the president for over four decades and is the single richest and most powerful man in the neighborhood. He's not about to worry about the quarantine at his age.

VINIETTA ABRAHAMSON, DWARF, FEMALE, 42 YEARS OLD, HEAD OF FOUR CORNERS BUSINESS ASSOC.

Vina is a woman with a mission. She firmly believes in the strength of the Four Corners neighborhood to overcome any adversity. They have fought off the encroachment of the megacorporations (or so they think), have rebuilt after fires, banded together during tough times, and worked hard to keep the Four Corners thriving. She's not willing to let anything hinder her little neighborhood, including some claims of a quarantine. "The folks of Four Corners are a healthy lot and they'll be fine" is her mantra.

TULVER MACKLEMORE, ELF, MALE, 18 YEARS OLD, HEAD OF THE FOUR CORNERS HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS ASSOCIATION

Young, attractive, athletic, and a head case. Tulver suffered an injury that would have put an end to his sports days in the fall of 2074. Instead of letting the injury take his teenage stardom away Tulver convinced his parents to allow him to volunteer for a NeoNET experimental procedure. The procedure involved nanites being used to repair his knee and initially seemed like a complete failure. Tulver entered into a depression, suffered some serious mood swings, and then suddenly one day he was better. His knee had healed, his mood had improved, and by the spring lacrosse season he was out on the field.

The nanites they used were infected with the CFD virus. They failed to repair the knee but managed to overwrite the kid and rocket him to the top of his league in every sport he played. The head case version of Tulver was well aware of how easily his cover could be blown, so he laid off just enough to make it seem like he had the occasional knee ache. He didn't excel too far above his peers, and generally just played like a star teenage athlete. He has been scouted by numerous top schools in basketball, football, and lacrosse and was ready for a bright future until this happened.

He has gotten close enough to the infected to know what is going on and wants everyone to stay calm and just go on with their lives. He's got most of the young population following his lead, as they're too afraid to question the school's most popular student. Tulver is hoping that when other infected awaken, they will be like him and join him. He's terribly mistaken but hey, even evil body snatching AIs can be wrong sometimes.

COLLEEN O'HARA, HUMAN, FEMALE, 29 YEARS OLD, OWNER OF FOUR CORNERS BAKERY

Colleen is only one of Miss O'Hara's names. The other is Scarlett. The owner of the bakery is also a local shadowrunner. She only has a small amount of influence with the neighborhood but is an easy insider for the runners to get on their side if they are really interested in helping these people out. She's a skilled mage and can be convinced to visit the sick and assense them to see what's going on. It's not easy and at first she simply sees that they are sick, but as she delves deeper she can tell there is something more at work and that the minds of the ill are under attack.

these buildings goes through the narrow little alleys on the sides, and those are currently under guard as well. There is one Citizen Soldier (p. 214) at each of the eight windows, four on the roof, and two in each of the alleys. When the shooting starts, they can fight against a force of superior numbers or run for the end of the block.

HEROES OF FOUR CORNERS

There will always be those who can't take it when something happens and instead of snapping, they simply live in denial. Denial makes them do dangerous things. This event is easy for the runners to avoid. They simply have to ignore the people of this small neighborhood and move through.

The neighborhood of Four Corners is a small place, only a few blocks, and the people there are all living in denial of the quarantine. They don't live close enough to see any borders, are far enough from downtown, and off the main roads that they haven't had to deal with any of the support for the quarantine coming through their quiet little neighborhood. They are dealing with a few very serious cases of "encephalitis" that they have chosen to not bring to the hospital, because they were told to limit movement under the quarantine. Their denial of

the events and danger have not prevented them from following the rules enforced on them. They simply don't choose to talk about the real reasons they are not taking anyone to the hospital or any other strange behaviors or events in evidence.

The problem is all those cases of "encephalitis" are an epidemic of head cases ready to explode from the middle of their quiet little community. The runners will get a front-row seat that shows something more is going on.

The runners can simply walk on through and leave before the trouble starts, or they can try to convince these people to kill their neighbors and friends before those neighbors and friends wake and try to kill them. Key individuals to convince in town are listed in the Four Corners Residents sidebar.

VOICES

Note: *All of* Shadowrun *deals with mature themes, but elements of this scene may be difficult or uncomfortable for some players. Be careful about introducing this scene to a group, with an understanding of the triggers your players may have.*

There are some who only keep their inner urges under control because they fear being shunned or incarcerated. When the quarantine begins, Miles Fenmore, mild-mannered clerk at the downtown Electronix shop, is unable to get to work. He spends the entire morning watching the events unfold on the local trid news until something inside him snaps. The voices and thoughts, which he has kept quiet and held inside for so long, suddenly slip free of their shackles.

Early Friday afternoon, he takes his Yamaha Pulsar and the Electronix work van out. Driving around he listens to the voices whispering to him. By nightfall he manages to grab twelve females to make a new collection. A young girl, a young woman, and a mature woman of each major hair color (blond, brown, red, and black). He subdues and drugs them, then takes them back to his home under the cover of darkness, sneaking them into the basement.

Saturday morning he begins his twisted experimentation directed by the voices, testing each female for "compatibility." Under threat of violence, Miles assaults the women and coerces them to cooperate in his delusion, what he thinks is science but is in reality systematic rape. He completes his first round of testing during the day. In the evening, as the runners are passing through the neighborhood where his home is, one of the women tries to escape. They see her pop out the door barely clothed, scream for help, spasm chaotically (as she is hit by a taser) and fall back out of sight.

The runners are presented with a combat challenge here and a moral question. If they become involved, Miles will at best manage to hit one runner with the taser before the rest of the team pummels him. The question then becomes what do the runners do with the women. Most of them are traumatized by the events and would not be able to make it back to their own neighborhoods without help.

How the runners handle this affects both their Karma reward and future potential for contacts and groups within the QZ. If the runners take the time to talk with some of the women and help them deal with what has just happened to them, they will create a survivor group inside the QZ. The women will choose to band together where they are at and create the Unlucky Ladies, a survivor crew that only accepts women, based out of the area of Ashmont.

If the runners simply leave, the women will try to get home. Nine will end up grabbed by some gang or other twisted person, two will take their own lives, and one will make it home. This means that in the future the runners could find one of these women in a similar situation. As a ganger who hates them for not helping, or as a vampire out for revenge on them, or any other story that might bring the bad Karma back around for such callous souls.

HEAD CASE

The minds of the weak willed or sick are no match for the CFD virus when the AIs in the code are Cerberus and Deus. As soon as an hour in, the first of the people exposed around MIT&T and Fenway were already changing. The concentration of nanites and their exposure to the ritual made them even faster at overcoming the will of individuals even without the mind getting a full rewrite. The problem is all of these early exposures are unstable and insane as their minds are a battleground hosting their own psyches, the mind of Cerberus, and the mind of Deus. They currently are all hyper aggressive and seeking to hurt others as they are hurting.

The next batch of head cases exposed to these particular consciousnesses generally came out like these first victims, but a few are emerged with other personalities. Only a very unique metahuman mind can hold the total psyche of Deus or Cerberus, but any mind can at least hold a small portion. Enough to remake a mind (and damage it), but not so much damage that the victim is a misanthropic homicidal maniac. Instead they seek to understand their new state. For more on the different types of head cases in Boston see the **Character Trove** (p. 211).

For this event the runners encounter one of the hidden looking to create her hiding spot. The woman, once named Stacey Mongeau, was at the Red Sox game, but was in the washroom during the dragon's crash. She wasn't exposed to a massive cloud of nanites; instead she was exposed to the aftereffects. She left the game immediately and went home. She had bad headaches on the way home, and fell asleep that night. The next

morning, a new being calling herself Stace woke up in her place.

Stace isn't fully aware that she is not human. She remembers much of Stacey's life, but more as images in a picture book than events she lived. She also has images of the interior of Renraku Arcology and the hunts that took place to contain her in the same picturebook fashion, as well as images of Seattle (where Stacey had never been) and feelings of being hunted there, as well as spending time in some sort of hospital.

All these feelings of being hunted created a deep desire within her to remain hidden, to be anonymous, to avoid being hunted. At first she planned to do this by being a recluse, but that didn't work because Stacey was a very social girl. Her friends kept calling, asking how she was, asking about the game and the dragon, and then wanting to come over or go out. Friday night, less than twelve hours from her awakening in this new form, her friend Courtney came over, even though Stace (and the local law enforcement) told her not to. Stace's reaction was almost feral. When Courtney arrived, Stace attacked. It was a nasty fight, and in the end Stace knocked out Courtney.

When Courtney woke up, she called herself Court, and she had the same base personality as Stace. The pair figured out it was something in their blood, and they invited over a few more friends on Saturday for a little party. Everyone drank and had fun, even with the insanity of the quarantine coming down. They didn't let that bummer stop them.

Sunday morning, over half of them woke up with the new personality, and the others woke up with really bad headaches and memories of weird dreams. Stace and Court let the headache ones sleep a little more while they explained what had happened to the others. By Sunday afternoon the other group had changed, and there were a total of fifteen of them, nine girls and six guys.

The group plans to hide by being out in the open and turning anyone who comes along and might be after them or suspicious of them. Problem is they are paranoid, so everyone could fit that definition.

The runners walk through the small block this group is living on, and they obviously look like trouble. They get invited to hang out for the night and party. If the runners refuse, the group lets them go by, but one of the head cases, Phil, will follow the runners. He's not skilled (Shadowing dice pool: 3) and will probably get caught. He'll explain to the runners what is going on back on that block. Stace is holding them all under some evil spell—at least that's how he describes it. He'll claim to be scared of her and the rest of them, but what he really wants is the runners to go after the others so he can get away. He is not in agreement with Stace's plan and thinks he'd survive much better by just hiding out. Phil is good at lying (Con dice pool: 9) and should be believable, but the runners don't need to come back with him.

If the runners let him go, he will leave. The head cases will think the runners killed him, and if the runners pass through their neighborhood again they will think the runners are back for the rest of them. They are not skilled fighters, but they are all aware of their nature and able to use their head case abilities. If the runners seem to be after them, they will hide in the various houses of the block and try to avoid the runners. It's like a giant game of hide and seek.

CROSSING THE ROAD

In order to reach the trainyards the runners are going to have to cross I-93. This stretch of the highway is inside the QZ and filled with abandoned, wrecked vehicles. The highway is bi-level here, with the lower level leading out of town and the upper level leading in. This way the tourists can see what they are driving toward while enjoying the city skyline and views of the harbor. The problem is it is also one of those places that Knight Errant has not been able to successfully cordon, and there are head cases walking along both levels.

When the runners climb up onto the lower level they can see a pair of ragers pounding on a sedan and staring into it like a squatter at a McHugh's. Another group of shamblers, two per member of the runner team, is approaching from about one hundred meters away, attracted by the commotion. Before the runners move on they hear faint screaming and cries for help that sound like they are coming from the sedan. Runners who zoom in or move up to get a closer look can see a small girl, clutching a teddy bear, sitting in the center of the car wailing and crying.

The runners can be cold and move on, or they can try to be the heroes. Heroes earn more Karma, while cold runners tend to survive longer. If they decide to be noble, runners should be able to take these head cases. Good tactics should easily dispatch the group.

The little girl, Abigail Edwards, is another story. She needs to be brought somewhere to be taken care of, but that means backtracking at least a little bit. The runners should have no problem with this, and the girl is happy and loves them for bringing her to a new safe family. See **It's a Wrap** for what happens down the road wherever the runners drop off the sweet little Abigail.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

The runners finally make it to the **Cabot Yard MBTA Maintenance and Storage Depot** (p. 170). The buildings are all visible from the highway, but there is very little activity outside the buildings. Every fifteen min-

utes a pair of Dragonfly drones flies out an upper story window on the wide train house, around the buildings in a double figure eight pattern and then fly back into the window. The whole circuit takes nine minutes. The drones are operated by a pair of the technomancers inside the facility and are just looking for anyone creeping around in the trainyard, as well as scanning for any active commlinks in the area.

The buildings of the trainyard look poorly kept up from the outside. The MBTA had no reason to make these look pretty when the train lines were moved underground and no longer rolled past on their way into South Station. Inside, the story is very different. Since they had to stay up to date with the train tech and the operations technology that coordinated with GridGuide to maximize efficiency between above—and below—ground transit as well as coordinating the road and track traffic on those few areas that were still above ground. The inside of the structures kept up with the times while the outside just kept getting uglier and uglier.

The buildings have been extensively tagged with both physical graffiti and AR graffiti tags. The physical graffiti is a mishmash of gangs, and local taggers throw paint over each other's marks in a quest for dominance and showmanship. It's normal city graffiti. The AR graffiti is different though. Only one gang's symbol has survived. Every AR graffiti tag shows a "D" that looks like it's made of crackling lightning that arcs out every few seconds. The runners might believe the "D" stands for Discontents, but the truth is it stands for Dissonance.

The station is occupied by seven Dissonance-worshipping technomancers lead by White Rabbit, a member of Ex Pacis. They have a few drones around, full control of the train repair facilities, and an army of sprites ready to wreak havoc on any piece of wireless gear they are directed at. These are not combat hardened fighters, but guerrilla-tactic-using malcontents who will happily trash every piece of wireless-enabled gear on the runners, including their cyber if they can get close enough. Then they may try to slip into hiding or hit the runners with the drones while they are weakened.

There are six Dragonfly drones, two Dobermans armed with an Ingram Smartgun loaded with explosive ammunition, and an LEBD-1 armed with an Ingram Smartgun loaded with gel rounds.

If the runners manage to kill or incapacitate four of the technomancers, the others will run. They jump into a train car at the end of one of the lines in the wide train house station, fire it up, and then crash through the main room and out through the back doors down into the tunnels. This group might not include White Rabbit and may leave the runners with a hunt on their hands. White Rabbit is no pushover; he's an experienced terrorist with years of experience under his belt. He may run with the others or stay to make more trouble for the runners while they make sure the place is clear for the Don. If White Rabbit stays and the runners just head back to the Don without making sure the place is clear, White Rabbit will kill the first batch of soldatos the Mafia boss sends. Then he'll return to Pax and explain how he lost one of the city's Dissonance Pools. The death of the soldatos will sour the Mafia Don's opinion of the runners.

IT'S A WRAP

PAX ON THEIR HOOP

Runners that complete the mission and run off White Rabbit and company gain themselves an even bigger enemy, Pax. She's not happy that someone has helped another group take control of one of the Dissonance pools in the city even if it isn't for the actual pool.

Pax won't come after the runners in any physical sense unless they become a real threat, but she will send her Dissonant technomancers to attack the runners' gear and mess with them through the Matrix. A bricked commlink inside the QZ is going to be hard to get fixed. It will make it impossible to access funds and identities on that commlink until it's fixed. Most of the time the attacks won't be about bricking devices and will instead be subtler. Runners will find their smartlink systems turning up errors and misaligning shots, their cyber will become glitchy and problematic, and their commlinks will broadcast spam or announce that they are a shadowrunner for hire cheap who is looking to do good deeds for all. Gamemasters are encouraged to be creative. These are hackers with a twisted sense of humor—coding a runner's cybereyes and ears to make him see and hear ghosts would not be outside their scope, and making the runners see friends as enemies would be perfectly hilarious for these evil hackers.

STACE AND THE CREW NEED HELP

Runners who met with Stace and company may be contacted again to help them out when the real hunters come looking for the head cases. Stace will contact whichever runner had the most interactions with them and will ask if they'd be interested in work. If the runners don't trust them (a very likely possibility) they'll make the offer over the commlink.

Stace's people are being targeted by runner teams collecting head cases. They've lost four in the past week and they need help protecting themselves. They want the runners to monitor the perimeter of their little piece of town and try to stop any other runners who might be coming to kidnap more of them.

Of course there will be more runner teams. In fact the area has become a hot hunting ground, thanks to Phil (or another head case with similar thoughts if the runners killed Phil) selling out this little cluster of head cases to protect himself and make a nice living in the QZ. He has been willing to inform runner teams and corporate squads where to find an enclave of head cases.

The runners will face a series of runner teams and corporate squads and keep getting paid but eventually will need to try to convince Stace and her group to go elsewhere. There will be evidence of Phil's involvement on one of the attacking runner's commlinks, a video or message, and if the runners take that to Stace she will ask the runners to go after Phil (or whoever).

BUT SHE LOOKED SO SWEET AND INNOCENT

Abigail Edwards was not under attack on that overpass; she was initiating the first stage of her very well-laid-out plan. She was infected at the baseball game with her dad and was one of those rare few who came through the process with an intact personality fused into their mind.

Abigail Edwards is the personification of Deus' desire to create worshippers and infuse them with his code. When she awoke the morning after the game she found her "dad" bumping into the bloody front door of their house trying to get out with her mother's body, which was beaten to a bloody mess on the floor at his feet. She told him to stop, and he listened. She ordered him to drive her to some of his buddy's houses that were at the game with them. The ones who had not escaped their homes and began terrorizing their neighborhoods were gathered up and brought back to the Edwards residence. She knew she couldn't fulfill her desires with these shambling zombies and instead began to devise a plan.

The runners helped her with stage one, which was getting into a community of normal people again. After that she began systematically using her nanites to infect the others, but not with her personality. Instead she used her knowledge from the Deus piece of her to make them slaves. The little community is now part of her plan to build a supercomputer out of both electronic and organic components. The people she controls now go out and look for electronics and kidnap people to use in Abigail's project.

There are a lot of ways for the runners to get involved in this again. They can be targeted for kidnapping and recognize one of the people they left with Abigail. They can be hired to look for a kidnapping victim, or they can return to the neighborhood where they left Abigail for a visit or to check on her and walk right into the weirdness.

Abigail has managed to figure out how to control the nanites and uses them to overwrite only certain portions of her slave's minds so that they can act normal but obey her every command, even to the point of injuring or killing themselves. Abigail herself is a very powerful manipulator head case and capable of feats well beyond what could be expected of a small girl.

FOUR CORNERS OUT OF CONTROL

Four Corners could have problems if the runners didn't clear out the entire issue the first time. If they don't help at all, those living in denial will get a rude awakening when the infected awaken as ragers. If Tulver is still around, he will gain a small measure of control over the ragers and will become the leader of this small community through threats and violence. The rest of the little neighborhood will serve him and his rager minions. One of the neighborhood people the runners spoke with (or anyone else the gamemaster wishes to use) will track the runners down and send them a message that asks for help but doesn't really explain the problem. When the runners go to investigate they will find a walled-off Four Corners, with Tulver in control.

If the runners convinced the locals to take care of the issue, the runners still find Tulver in control, but instead of a small group of ragers he has a larger group of shamblers that he created from people in the area. The runners are contacted in the same way as above.

The only way Four Corners comes away clean is if the runners convince the neighborhood that the sick are dangerous and discover Tulver's true nature. If this occurs the runners will have a safe little neighborhood to work from, full of very appreciative people. There will be a few locals who aren't happy with the runners because members of their family were among the sick. These characters can create drama or troublesome situation for the runners if they choose to operate from this area. A few might even go so far as to get themselves infected and then go after the runners to infect them.

CHARACTERS

SHANE O'CONNOR

(MAFIA JOHNSON, P. 224)

Proud to be Irish but even prouder to be part of the O'Rilley family, O'Connor has been working as a Johnson for the family for about five years. Before that he was muscle. He has a thick Boston accent and loves this city. He'll deal straight with anyone as long as he doesn't think they have ties to any anti-mob or anti-elf groups like the Knights of the Red Branch. He's coldly rude to any runners with connections to those organizations and focuses his dealings with the others. He's a genuinely upbeat guy and hasn't let the growing chaos of the QZ get to him.

MILES FENMORE

(RAPIST CREEP, P. 222)

This sick individual has decided to listen to his worst impulses and cast all rationality and human compassion aside. He's giving in to the urges he's suppressed for years and going out to kidnap subjects for his twisted sexual science experiment. He's thin and geeky and looks completely harmless, but he has a psychopathic side. He is far more likely to run from trouble than to fight and will try to avoid a confrontation with the runners if he can.

WHITE RABBIT

(EX PACIS TECHNOMANCER, P. 226)

Beginning to work on Pax's plan to develop a massive Dissonance pool in the city of Boston, White Rabbit is out trying to get control of some major computing areas to get the processing power for his master's plan. Named for his red eyes and puffy white hair, he is also always down the rabbit hole and has a crazy look in his eyes all the time. His name may sound all cute and cuddly, but he's vicious and has little problem attacking to kill or cause serious bodily harm.

STACE

(HIDDEN HEAD CASE, P. 225)

Stace is a one of the hidden who is not quite sure what she is due to the lack of knowledge and fragmenting in the initial AIs. She's trying to figure it out with the others and make herself a protective little community through infection. She is paranoid, a leftover mental trait from the AI's captivity, and so are all the copies of her, though others are expressing it in different ways. She's cute, petite, and kind of punk in her style and attitude. She definitely isn't into violence and would prefer a non-violent solution to problems but will resort to anything when it comes to staying free of captivity.

LOCATIONS

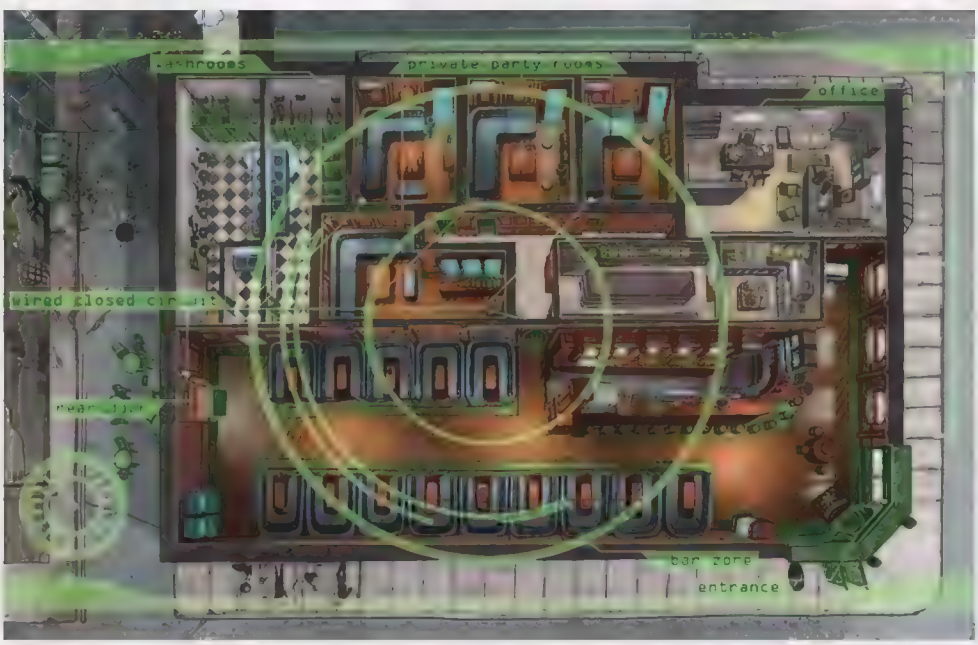
BEADED SHAMROCK

This place is a classic Irish pub. It even has a sign on the door that asks patrons to turn off their AR and enjoy a real piece of history. The tables and bar are all real wood, and the bar is stocked with a full range of real Irish whiskeys along with the regular load of synthahols. The bar area is long and narrow with booths along the outer wall, and the bar itself lining half of the inner wall with booths along the rest. At the center of the inner wall is the door to the back where there is a small kitchen, stockroom, four private party rooms, and the office. At the rear of the bar the runners can find the washrooms and back door out to an alley seating area used during nice weather. At the back of the alley is a three-meter-tall iron fence and gate that is usually locked.

The bar uses a wired closed-circuit camera system with cameras over the front and rear entrances, in the back alley, in each rear private party room, and in the back hallways by the private rooms. The cameras go to a terminal in the office monitored by an O'Rilley soldato at all times, even overnight.

The bar is a hangout for members of the O'Rilley Mafia family and frequently hosts meetings for Mafia Johnsons and runners, especially when the Johnsons want the runners to know for whom they are really working. The place occasionally hosts meets for other Johnsons looking to throw the runners off their real employers, but only if the job won't damage the reputation of the Mob or risk retaliation from angry runners.

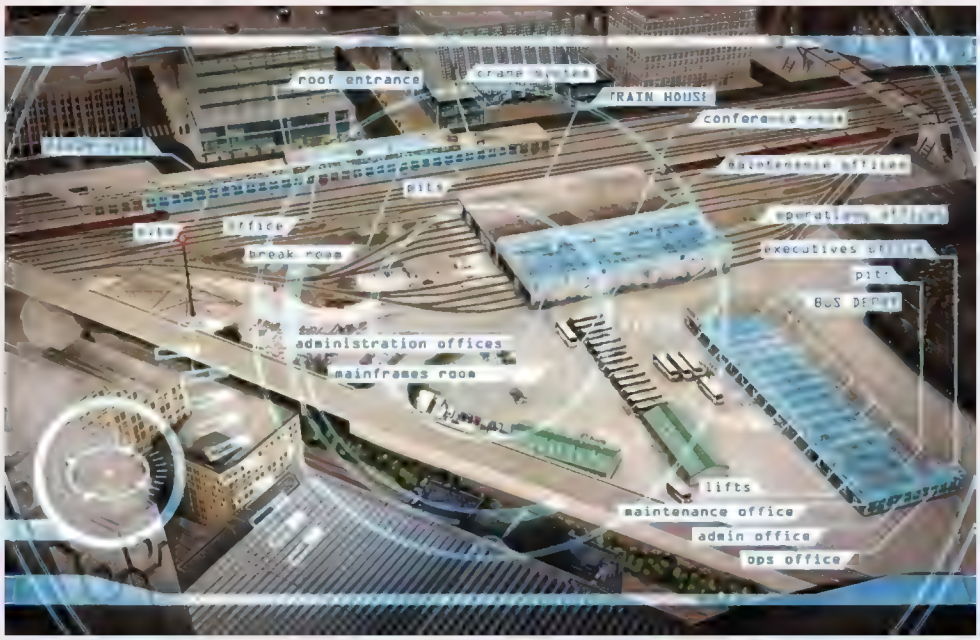
The bar's patrons are a mix of locals and mobsters with a few runners usually thrown in for good measure. Gunplay is frowned on, and a quick way to make O'Rilley angry is to put a hole in some of the real wood furnishings. Fistfights are common and usually result in some drink buying by the loser.



CABOT YARD MBTA MAINTENANCE/STORAGE DEPOT

Still aboveground, unlike most of the train systems for the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, this facility acts as a repair and control station for all of the train routes. The depot consists of four buildings. A parts warehouse and a long train house on the west side, a shorter but wider train house near where the tunnels

surface, and an administration and bus depot building east of the wide train house.



The parts warehouse is two stories but only half of it has two floors. It has four small doors, one on each side, with the north and west doors at the top of metal stairways that lead to the upper floor offices. The east side of the building has four train-size garage doors, two of which lead to loading docks; the others simply pull onto the warehouse floor. The inside of the place is full of large metal, wood, and plastic shelving filled with train and bus parts (and boxes of train and bus parts) as well as supplies for all the offices. The upper floor has offices for the maintenance department, a break room, washrooms, and a metal-working shop where parts can be modified. There is also a stairwell to the roof where there is a walkway over to the long train house roof.

The long train house is 250 meters long and has two tracks inside where long trains are worked on without disconnecting cars. It is also where a lot of illegal merchandise is unloaded away from prying eyes. It has a roof entrance and walkway and two large doors at each end near the tunnels that lead back down to the tracks. Inside is a raised central platform for loading and unloading, a crane system, pits in the floors for working under the trains, and an office and break room at the center of the building.

The wider train house has fourteen bays with doors at both ends close to where the tracks go back into the tunnels. There are three smaller doors along the west wall. The east wall has three smaller doors at ground level and two smaller doors at the top of metal staircases that lead up to the operations and administration offices. The east side of the building has two floors. The upper floor houses the offices and equipment for the workers—maintenance, administration, and operations all in separate areas on the same level. A small hallway and conference room connects all three near the middle of the building where all three groups come together for meetings. Maintenance is nearest the trains, with a long, narrow section of building and office windows overlooking half the trains. There is a metal stairway at the center of the building for maintenance staff to access the floor. Administrations and operations split the other half of the upper floor about equally, with operations getting a slight advantage where the bulk of their mainframes are located. Administration shares the mainframes but doesn't need even a thousandth of the processing power. The inside offices are nice and cushy for admin and ops, but very minimalistic on the maintenance side. The outside of the building looks rusty and about ready to fall apart, but beneath the ancient-looking metal siding is a thick frame of steel and ferrocrete. The outside has long been left to the elements and hasn't been kept up much since the trains went underground and no longer pass by.

The bus depot building has sixteen bus bays, all with lifts and pits for working on the busses, along the south side that also provide access to an internal bus lot where cleaning and internal maintenance take place. The east end of the south side has the maintenance office that connects to the offices. The ops and admin offices take up most of the east side of the building all the way back to the internal bus bay. There is a small second story on the east side of the building above the regular administration offices for the executives who work here.

DIGGING DEEPER

A.J. ducked into another alley, his fourth in as many blocks. He was used to making it further between detours but something was up. There was more activity in this area now than there had been before, even just a week earlier, which was the last time he had taken a job to go inside the MCZ—the MIT&T Containment Zone.

The MCZ was one of the most popular places in the QZ for runners to pick up contracts, and he'd been in on four occasions in the last week. It wasn't a place you wanted to live, and it wasn't a place you wanted to visit either, but if someone was paying you—well, everybody has their price. The zone consisted of the campus of MIT&T, or at least what was once their campus. Now it was more of a war zone, and it included a big chunk of Cambridge to the west. This was where all the craziness started, and it was also the initial area of the MIT&T cordon that Knight Errant put into place to curb the craziness.

Now it was a sealed-off section of the city where survivors struggled everyday and prayed for the day one of the "good" runner teams found them. The teams that actually helped people they found trapped inside instead of just saying that was why they were going into the MCZ. A.J. was usually a part of that kind of team, but right now he was running solo. Dangerous, yes, but he often found it safer when he was the only person he had to look out for.

The far end of the alley he had ducked down was clear, but he could hear something rustling in a dumpster between him and his next turn. It could be anything—a raccoon, a wild dog, a shambler, or even a survivor—though he would be surprised they had lasted this long while making that kind of noise.

Cautiously he approached, Colt at the ready and reading green across the board. He considered just putting a round through the side, but bullets were precious. It would also make more noise than the rustling. Never a good thing to make noise in the MCZ. A.J. crept quietly up to the dumpster. He was making very little noise and figured he could have crept right past, but he didn't want to leave trouble behind him if he could avoid it. He worked out a few plans in his head besides random shooting and walking by, eventually settling on what he thought was a good idea.

With his left hand A.J. picked up a small discarded bottle cap from among the detritus of the alley. He went to the side of the dumpster and made a few small scratching sounds. The rustling within stopped. He made a few more scratches and heard the sounds again, but this was different. The rustling sounded like something was searching, and the noise sounded slow and deliberate, like something was creeping.

A.J. let his eyes and the aim of the Colt go to the lid of the dumpster while his left hand continued to scratch with the bottlecap. The sound inside got louder for a moment and then stopped. A.J. figured whatever was inside heard its mistake and paused. He kept up the scratching.

The sudden burning pain in A.J.'s left hand revealed the truth of his mistaken assumption. Yelping in pain, he instinctively released the bottlecap and withdrew his hand, but he realized his mistake too late. The pain flared worse as he watched the massive rat lift with his retreating hand and felt its sharp front teeth rotate inside his palm. He fought the instinct to shake the creature free and risk shredding his hand in the process. Instead, he pushed the greasy brown-furred monstrosity up against the dumpster and brought the Colt to bear on its large, rounded body.

The Trickshooter Smartlink software loaded into A.J.'s headware warned that the angle of fire had a nineteen percent chance of ricochet and self-injury, but he ignored the information and pulled the trigger. The big pistol bucked in his hands, and A.J.'s heightened reflexes allowed him to experience the next second in vivid and unpleasant clarity.

The big pistol round punched solidly into the rat's unprotected hide. The explosive round didn't pop when it hit the ribs on either side of its journey through the rat. Instead it exploded when it hit the dumpster on the back end. A.J. felt the rat's jaws loosen just as the bloody bits of the creature blasted out all over A.J.'s face and clothes. He felt the hot shell casing bounce off his cheek and race the now-dead rat's lower half to the ground.

Though the pistol was equipped with an internal silencer, the bullet hitting the dumpster and exploding was not. The noise echoed through the alley and out into the nearby streets.

A.J. holstered the Government for a moment and pried the dead rat's jaws open while trying not to in-

jure his hand any further. The bloody head and what remained of the body fell to the ground and were quickly snagged and pulled back into the shadows by what looked like the rat's offspring, though they were all still as large as any rat had a right to be.

A.J. tucked his injured left hand into his right armpit and beat feet for the far end of the alley. He was still ten meters from the mouth when two shamblers rounded the corner and locked their glassy stares on him. They were a comical duo, one a slightly built young man in a ragged business suit, the other a robust older gentleman in shorts, a t-shirt, and an apron that read, "Kill it and grill it! Real men eat meat!" A.J. could tell by both of the men's bloody faces that meat had been on the menu, but it likely had not been grilled, and may not have even been dead yet.

A.J. didn't slow. He drew the Colt on the move, raised the pistol, lined up the smartlink crosshair on the head of the grillmaster, and squeezed the trigger. The quiet chuff was followed by a crack, slurp, and pop as the bullet broke skull, slipped into grey matter, and then exploded. The grillmaster fell to the ground while A.J. dropped his shoulder and shoved the young executive back out of the alley into the street.

A.J. made a quick glance to the left and saw another small pack of shamblers approaching. The right looked clear but wasn't the original way he wanted to go. The choices were clear: fight forward, or retreat through the clear. With his hand already starting to throb and a burning sensation creeping up his arm, A.J. chose the path of least resistance, and hopefully the path that could get him to medical aid.

As he moved quickly back through the streets and alleys he had only recently crept through, he laughed a little. It might have been the pain making him delirious, but he was able to find at least a little bit of humor in the situation. The battle-proven runner turned back by a common rat defending its home. There was a metaphor in there somewhere, but he wasn't clear-headed enough for metaphors, only delirious enough to laugh at the thought of his defeat at the jaws of a rather large, but still quite mundane, brown rat.

INTRO

This series of events occurs after the initial quarantine hubbub, as the area is beginning to settle a little bit. This group of events is designed to mirror some of the *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* events and follow a similar pattern to the video game.

The runners will be hired to work for different groups and get counteroffers and new jobs as they complete work. This is similar to the game plot, but a quick single arc where the runners perform work for each group only once before they are introduced to and hired by the next faction.

It starts with Knight Errant hiring them to work inside the MIT&T quarantine zone. After that, NeoNET sees their work and hires them to infiltrate deeper into the labs at MIT&T. Next, Evo hears of their infiltration for NeoNET and hires them to steal data from one of NeoNET's offsite data storage facilities. This is followed by Aztechnology hearing about the data theft and hiring them to plant data at a Knight Errant precinct. Next, the Independents catch wind of runners with solid skills and they hire them to deliver supplies to another group. The last event occurs when the Dissonant technomancers hear of the runners getting into the MIT&T labs and hire them to get access to the mainframe at the school. Here they face one of the AI offspring of Cerberus and Deus—Cereus!

SETUP

The setup event for each of these separate events is very similar. The runners are contacted by a representative of each group that chooses to go by their actual names instead of the classic Mr. Johnson cover. The call comes to the commlink of the runner with the highest combined Street Cred and Charisma. If there's a tie, just pick one and make all the calls go through them.

The job offers and payments are all made via commlink. The runners never meet any of these Johnsons in the real world. The payments and terms for each run are listed in the events along with the name of the contractor. Many of these contractors are the same ones the characters in *Shadowrun Chronicles* will interact with, and each is detailed in the **Character Trove** (p. 211), along

with a short description at the end of the Characters section of this chapter.

EVENT 1

The runners are contacted by Detective Daniel "DJ" McCarthy, the current head of Knight Errant's shadow operations. He's hiring runners for operations that KE won't authorize regular officers to perform. In this case he wants the runners to go inside the MIT&T quarantine and help a group of survivors escape. The initial payment offer is 500 nuyen for each survivor who makes it out. At their last message, sent three days ago, the group had ten survivors, meaning the run is worth as much as 5,000 nuyen to start, but they lose cash with every lost survivor.

DJ offers the runners access to one of the gates (Route 28 and 3rd Street) and gives them an address (65 Otis Street, Apartment 2C) for the group's last known location, but the runners are on their own from there.

Inside the MIT&T containment zone, the runners enter the hell within hell. There are two ways to go about this event. The first is to use the outline of opponents and events presented here. The second is to allow more freedom, meaning this area can be as hard or as easy as the gamemaster desires, but the reward should match. Inside the MCZ the runners should face head cases of all varieties, though mostly shamblers and ragers, as well as ghouls who have come up through the sewers to feed on the carnage. For the gamemaster doing his own thing, the location of the survivors can be at the address given, or the runners can be forced to sneak around the area or fight their way to another location after a clue from the first.

Assuming the runners are not charging straight through the middle of the streets, the first encounter they have will be with ghouls (p. 404, *SR5*). As the runners sneak through the narrow back alleys of this neighborhood, they come across a pair of ghouls feeding on some recent victims of the head cases. The ghouls are not being quiet, and the runners should easily hear them slurping and chomping. If the runners want to sneak past they will have to make Sneaking + Agility Tests against the ghouls' Perception + Intuition as well as against the group of shamblers they might come near in an effort to avoid the ghouls. If the runners are using gunplay with unsuppressed weapons, see the **Here We Are** sidebar for details on what follows.

After the ghouls, the next obstacle is a pack of ten shamblers wandering the bottom floor of the building where the runners were told to find the survivors. The shamblers have been trapped on the bottom floor for at least a day and are stumbling and bumping into everything but are unable to open the doors. This is actually the first clue that the survivors aren't here. The group got the attention of the shamblers near their hiding spot and drew them into the building, then locked the doors on them so the group could climb out a second-story window and move elsewhere.

The runners can easily locate a fire escape to climb up and avoid the shamblers, but only if they manage to hear them first. The shamblers aren't particularly noisy as they shuffle around inside and they are not all next to the door. If the runners open one of the doors, the shamblers in the hallway (probably two or three of them) will yell and run at the door. This will attract the rest and either leave the runners with a fight at the doorway or a bunch of running shamblers slamming into a door. It is altogether possible the running shamblers could break the door down, but that is left to the gamemaster to decide.

When the runners reach the apartment where the survivors sent their last message, they find no one. There are obvious signs that people were living here, including empty canned foods, wrappers, a toilet full of urine and feces, and the smell of stale sweat still in the air. If the runners look around they will locate a note scrawled on

an empty cereal box in the cupboard. It is addressed to DJ, their contact (in fact the only person to talk to them) from Knight Errant. It expresses thanks for coming to look for them but says they had to move.

They've left another address (117 Charles Street) where they plan to go. It's four streets south, so not far, but the message isn't dated. The runners can make a Survival + Willpower (3) (Urban specialization applies) Test to determine that it has been two days since they were here. This is mostly from the level of drying in the toilet, so it's a gross test.

Between the two locations, the runners will find mostly houses, a few apartments, and a lot of shamblers. The group will have to make at least two Sneaking + Infiltration Tests. A failed test results in two shamblers noticing something and coming to look. A glitch results in four shamblers coming to look. A critical glitch results in two shamblers actually spotting them and charging at them, four more noticing that and following, and a rager hearing the commotion and coming to attack as well.

If the runners are attacked, they also get the attention of a different group of survivors hiding in the nearby condominium tower. Once the runners defeat the head cases, they see a series of light flashes from an upper floor of the tall structure nearby. With vision magnification they can see a ragged-looking person with a large flashlight blinking it on and off in a random pattern. If the runners make any kind of gesture indicating that they want to communicate, the man holds up a commlink, waves it around, and then turns it on. They can now contact the group.

In this condo tower, a converted building that once held the Middlesex Courthouse, is a group of eight survivors hiding out on the fourteenth floor. They warn the runners that the building is crawling with shamblers and ragers, and they think there is some kind of "Master" in their building as well. They ask the runners to help get them out and to the wall, where they have already made contact with a guard who will allow them to enter the KE facility. Though the runners don't know this, Detective McCarthy will pay for any and all survivors they bring out, not just the group they were sent after.

Inside the building there is indeed a Master. One of the manipulators has taken control of a block of condos on the third floor as well as the rooftop area. He is building up a force of head cases to eventually throw at the wall and break through to get out of the MCZ. He is well aware of the QZ beyond but also knows he can't do anything against NeoNET from inside here. If the manipulator encounters the runners, he may change his plan. Instead of attacking the walls with shamblers and ragers, he will try and contact KE to get him and his group of survivors out. The manipulator's force consists of fourteen ragers currently out on the rooftop area and thirty shamblers stumbling around the third floor. In order to get to the group on the upper floor, the runners will need to get past the third floor. This is really as simple as sneaking past the third floor on the stairwell, but runners can often be more creative than they need to be. Tension can be added when sneaking back down, as one of the survivors recognizes a shambler on the third floor near the door and has to be restrained and pulled away to prevent them from trying to save their friend.

At the new address the runners find the building, a small house, is currently mobbed by twenty to thirty shamblers and four ragers on the outskirts looking like rabid dogs held at bay or waiting for some sign of what they need to go after. Part of the survivor group is inside. They were spotted, the group got split, and this group got chased here. There are four survivors in here. Each one is currently watching a room and making sure the shamblers don't manage to push their way in.

The runners will need to distract the head cases and draw them away from the house in order to get the survivors out. Whatever they do is likely to bring more head cases to this area. The four survivors will thank the runners but insist that they go to the secondary rendezvous to find the others. If the runners refuse or insist they come back to the wall and get out before the runners go back for the rest of the group, a pair of them look at each other suspiciously and then run off in opposite directions.

The pair will meet back up a few blocks away if the runners chase and lead the runners right to the secondary rendezvous, where they spot the other group on the roof of a house. The group will probably have two people awake and on watch while the other four lay on opposite sides of the roof, sleeping and tied together to avoid falling off the roof. This will change if it's daytime and then they will all be awake and trying to occupy their time while trapped. The house they are on is surrounded by hundreds of head cases. An inner group of ragers circle like sharks, occasionally leaping at the roof. The gutters are gone, and the runners can see where the ragers have managed to grab the roof, but have obviously been unable to climb up. A twenty-meter-deep ring of shamblers wander the outer edges, held back by the ragers and all staring at the group on the roof.

If the two members of the group who ran are with the runners, they will suggest drawing them all off with a distraction. It's a good plan if the group consisted only of shamblers, but this group has ragers who could run them down. Let the runners be creative in developing a plan. The head cases are easily distracted and almost mindless but they are tireless and will keep chasing the group. The runners will need to either kill them all somehow (not likely, but runners are creative) or trap them like the survivors did in the first apartment building. This is tough with ragers and shamblers, but if they can trap the ragers they should be able to outrun the shamblers.

After the runners have all the survivors, it's just a matter of getting back to the gate and getting them out. If the runners have brought back the survivors in chunks, they will find the ones they have returned in the quaran-

tine holding cells at the wall as KE tries to make sure no one who is infected with "encephalitis" is among those who try to leave.

The runners are paid in full for every survivor they bring back. Helping additional survivors without concern for payment should result in an extra Karma award for those players who never mentioned or argued about getting paid by McCarthy and simply wanted to help the other group of survivors.

HERE WE ARE

If the runners make a lot of noise inside the MCZ, they will draw the attention of nearby head cases. Shamblers walk toward the sounds, while ragers tend to run after everything. For every unsuppressed shot that is fired from a handgun or SMG, 1D6 shamblers and 1 rager respond to the noise. For shotgun and assault rifles it's 2D6 and 2 ragers. Assault cannons and explosions draw 3D6 shamblers and 1D6 ragers. The amount of time the head cases take to arrive—and whether the runners are even still around when they do—is up to the timing of events and the speed of the runners in getting on the move. An entire combat could only last six seconds and not give the head cases time to arrive before the runners are already moving away. The runners could also run right into the approaching head cases.

Also remember any spells that might have a loud effect as well. Also don't forget that these head cases have a sense for electronics in their area and Matrix attack potential. That's why the messages from the group are sporadic, because they don't want to draw the attention of the head cases when they activate their commlinks. Runners who are operating their commlinks in the open are constantly risking drawing every head case within 50 meters to their location. Make a Matrix Perception Test for the head cases to spot commlinks or active wireless gear that is not protected in some way, such as being turned off.

EVENT 2

NeoNET quickly gets word through the grapevine that a team of runners has successfully gone into the MCZ and offers the runners another job within minutes of their exit. The quick turnaround doesn't offer a lot of recovery time but the NeoNET Johnson, Zoh Rothberg, offers the runners 10,000 nuyen each to go back in for her. Runners can make the standard Negotiations + Charisma Test to increase the payday by 500 nuyen per net hit, up to a maximum payment of 15,000 each. This quick turnaround also allows the runners to use a cover of going back for more survivors to allow KE to let them back in. If they are too beaten and refuse the job, she offers to pull a few strings and get KE to bring in a healer for them, but it will cost anyone who needs healing 2,500 nuyen. If the runners refuse they can walk away and will get another call in a few days. Zoh puts a similar offer on the table, reduced by twenty-five percent, and suggests they use the previous cover and ask Detective McCarthy for a chance to earn more money. Rothberg is asking the runners to go back in, get to MIT&T Arcane Research Lab number 15, get footage of the room, including stills and video, and copy all the files off the comm terminal in the professor's office.

The perils of the street remain the same as the team moves back toward the Arcane Research Lab. The labs are located all over the campus to take advantage of different aspects in different areas. Lab 15 is located on the fifteenth floor of the Pyramid building, one of the school's primary thaumaturgy buildings. Reaching the building is only the beginning of the trouble; inside, the runners face a strange situation.

Security in the Pyramid is provided by spirits of every variety, all summoned and bound by the students as practice and loaned to the Security Services Officers (SSO). The spirits have done an excellent job of keeping the place free of head cases, with the exception of the four SSO who are on duty. Three of them are shamblers, the fourth is a rager. They no longer have the mental capacity to command the spirits, but the spirits still protect them due to their standing instructions. Runners who attack any of the head cases in the building will be attacked by the spirits attached to that SSO. Each officer has two low Force (2 or 3) spirits and one Force 6 or greater spirit summoned by a graduate-level student. All the students who summon here are studying cultural thaumaturgy, so the spirits come in a wide variety of forms from cultures all around the world.

Research Lab 15 is where part of the ritual to allow the copy of Cerberus to reenter Eliohann took place. It also has its own localized security in the form of five Force 4 Spirits of Man who were here to aid their summoners during the ritual on the night of the fifteenth. Their summoners are all currently hiding in the office on the thirtieth floor.

The lab fills the entire triangular center of the fifteenth floor. The outside rim of the floor is a hallway with glass on both sides. The glass around the lab is spider-webbed and very difficult to see through, while the glass on the outside is still pristine. Inside the lab is a triangular pattern on the floor, with a five-pointed star drawn in its center. The top of the pyramid and the star are joined. The arms of the star then contact the two legs of the pyramid at the center, with the lower star legs dividing the base of the pyramid into three parts. Each point where the star touches the pyramid has a half-burnt candle.

The points of the triangle each have an incense burner with nothing but ash left. The top point of the pyramid and star has a burner beneath the candle. Various arcane symbols are drawn in each section of the floor pattern. Runners can make a Magical Theory + Logic [Mental] (4) Test to determine that the ritual here was all about centralizing and merging something. Anything short of the threshold simply allows the runners to identify various symbols that seem to represent the middle or center of something, including the location of the ritual on the central surface of the building.

The runners' presence in the lab will be noticed by the spirits and reported to their summoners who will order the spirits to delay the runners and try to keep them there until they arrive. They will be ordered to attack or seal the stairwell if the runners try to leave. The summoners will then summon air spirits to carry them down the elevator shaft to the sixteenth floor and then take the stairs down. The fifteenth floor has no elevator access.

If the runners are still present when the security mages arrive, the mages will first try to talk and find out why the runners are there and who they are. The mages have been getting supplies from their employer, but they have gotten no word on a rescue. The runners can offer to get them out if they want, but the mages may take issue with being turned over to KE for a few days. They'll offer the runners double the money to get them to the gate, and they say they will take care of themselves beyond that. The runners can be paid up front for this as the mages have access to their commlinks, but when they turn them on they attract the local head cases to their location. The way out may be a running battle down the stairs as the runners get mobbed by the head cases and the spirits that protect them.

The same issues occur out on the street, but the runners have the ability to ask the mages to provide some spell and summoning assistance if they're smart. If the runners are not smart enough, or too proud to ask for help, the mages do it for themselves. Every time trouble rolls around, they hide through spells and spirit powers.

Back at the gate they use similar tricks to get past the guards. Along the way the gamemaster is free to add more survivors for the runners to help, but remember to add in a little more difficulty since they will be getting some good cash for all these people they bring back.

EVENT 3

If going into that place not once, but twice, wasn't bad enough, the runners are contacted by a third Johnson as soon as they are out again. Evo representative Aaron Creech contacts the runners and asks them to go back in for him. He offers the runners a ridiculous 20,000 nuyen each, non-negotiable, to head right back in for him. He needs data retrieved from a location inside the MCZ and has heard the runners are the group to talk to.

Curious runners may ask how all these Johnsons know about them, and they will get a simple reply from Creech: "Knight Errant does not pay their officers enough to keep them quiet."

Once the team agrees, he tells them that he wants all the files tagged Vulcan, Abyss, Imago, Dickens, and Inferno from the mainframes stored at the data storage facility located at 49 Allston Street inside the MCZ. He warns the runners that the facility does not look like anything they would expect as an offsite storage facility. Instead, it looks like a small house at the end of a normal block in a middle class neighborhood. A goldmine of data, hidden in plain wrapper.

Runners face the usual on the way in but more of it, as they need to travel all the way across the area. If they slip down into the sewers they face ghouls instead of head cases and gamemasters are encouraged to put more manipulators and maybe some of the hidden inside for encounters. Maybe even one of the hidden living among some survivors looking to try to get out.

As the runners move through more of the MCZ, they should also start to notice areas that are relatively uninhabited, along with some places where the shamblers and ragers are starting to congregate. The longer these original infected survive in here, the more of a personality that can begin to develop. They can also fall into packs, working like animals trying to survive, and some may even be mistaken for ghouls from afar as they feed on the dead, since other food is becoming more and more scarce inside the MCZ.

The data storage house, officially known as NeoNET Project Data Storage Facility 318, is a three-floor, 150-square-meter house in a quiet Boston neighborhood. The facility is primarily protected by its anonymity, but it has a small security detail assigned to it who have now dug in to try to survive the insanity of the MCZ.

The home's security system consists of wired cameras all slaved to the homes terminal, with 360-degree coverage of the surrounding property. It is a corner house and also has long sight lines along the two streets on which it sits. Approaching the home without being spotted will be difficult. The security inside the house, three highly trained members of Minuteman Security's Asset Protection Division (use Minuteman Security Asset Protection Specialist, p. 223), will try and slow anyone trying to make entry before ducking into the basement and locking themselves into the mainframe vault hidden there.

From the vault they have control of the automated door and window systems via the wired security systems and will try to open them as well as making noise to attract head cases to the house to disrupt the runners. Before they initiate this system, they will warn the runners and offer them a chance to leave peacefully. It's not likely to happen, since the runners will probably have been injured by them when they enter, but the security detail doesn't really want to be locked down in the vault for an extended period.

Inside the vault is one week's worth of food and water for four people. Outside the vault, in the secure basement, is over two month's worth of food and water for four people. It started out as three month's worth, but the security team has been eating. This means that theoretically the runners can outlast the security team, but they don't know that and they have to deal with the head cases that will be attacking. They also cannot leave the basement door unattended, as the security detail has control of all the doors and windows in the house. The basement door has motors on both sides of the door and opens both ways, meaning the runners can destroy the motor on their side and block the door, but the security team can still open it the other way.

It comes down to convincing the security detail to come out or beating them into the vault in the first place. In order to convince them, the runners will have to offer them something they don't already have and aren't likely to be able to get. The security detail knows what's going on, and they'll agree to let the runners in as long as the runners agree to go along with their story on the outside.

The security detail wants out of their current job. They aren't happy being trapped inside this place. They will agree to let the runners copy files as long as the runners agree to help them get out of the MCZ and go along with the story that the runners were looking for survivors and the house was overrun by head cases. The security detail says they will destroy the mainframe vault as they leave. The runners can hand over their data to whoever they want, but the security detail promises to destroy the copies left behind. If the runners agree, the security detail comes out.

The long game does not play out like that, though.

When the runners reach the wall, the security detail informs the KE officers that the runners have stolen NeoNET data in their possession and that they forced them to destroy their facility and then return to the wall with them. The runners will be detained and KE will take the data, but only one copy—smart runners who made a back up can still get paid. The KE guards know that the players are shadowrunners, so they don't arrest them. They just return the stolen data to the security detail. The security detail also has in their possession a full copy of the vault storage data, so they didn't lose anything. They just got the runners to help them get out and bring the secure data back to their bosses. Dirty corporate bastards!

EVENT 4

After the last debacle, the runners get a short break before they get the next call to go back into the MCZ. The call will come within a week. The voice on the other side has a smooth Aztlaner accent and asks them if they would be interested in using their experiences to help out his employers. The man on the call introduces himself as Sandellero and politely introduces a second voice as Chen.

The pair pitch the runners on returning to the MCZ and doing some work for them. They offer the runners 5,000 nuyen each to deliver a datafile to a computer system inside the MCZ. Before giving any further details, they make sure to get the runners to agree to the basic outline of the operation. The reason for this becomes very obvious once the pair make their full pitch. The two do not say who they are working for or who they represent, but the runners can easily ask around to discover the pair are Johnsons for Aztechnology.

Once the runners have agreed, Sandallero sends them an address and a datafile. The address, 200 Albany Street, is the location of Knight Errant Station House 227B. The runners are assigned with breaking into the KE station house and adding the data file to the station's data storage. Their employers ask the runners to be professionals and avoid accessing the data file, but there are no data bombs or encryption on it.

The file contains a list of names with images, brief profiles, and single-word codes attached to each. The codes might seem familiar, as they are the same words that the runners were hired to get the data off the NeoNET system for in the last mission. The names and profiles look like scientists or executives who were related to the projects, and the names even include the familiar Aaron Creech from Evo.

The standard issues apply when moving through the MCZ, but it should be old hat for the runners by now and to avoid most, if not all, of the head cases and ghouls. Runners may actually spot other runner teams inside, if the gamemaster wishes, as a lot of activity is going down inside the MCZ by this time.

The Knight Errant Station House is not so easy to avoid, and what is going on here might be a surprise for the runners. When they get close enough to get eyes on the building, they get a chance to notice that it is not abandoned. In fact, it is quite busy inside and around the perimeter. The station house seems to be up and running inside the MCZ, but looks can be deceiving.

The area for about a block in each direction around the station house is devoid of head cases. This is not completely abnormal, as the runners have seen other areas without head cases, but it certainly is strange to see a concentration of KE officers in a working building right in the center of an open area.

Some runners may think that since they are working for KE (probably the cover they used to get into the MCZ) they can just walk in and talk to the officers, maybe even talk their way into access, but most runners will just assume they have to do this the hard way. If they try to walk in, it gets very ugly, very quickly. The truth of what is going on here is a secret that can't get out. The KE officers here are all head cases. The functional kind. They are masquerading as KE officers and working on their acting skills in order to eventually sneak out into

the world and infiltrate other areas. For now, they wait, and they can't let anyone find out what they are doing.

The station house is described in the **Locations** section, and the runners can sneak in through one of the non-standard entrances. They will be dealing with forty-five head cases if things go south, and these ones will run them down to the ends of the earth, or at least the MCZ, in order to save their secret.

Once the data is on the system, the runners can sneak back out and hopefully continue to avoid getting spotted. This job offers an additional payday and chance at future work if the runners bring the info about what has happened at the station back to Detective McCarthy. He'll drop an extra 1,000 nuyen on each of them for the info and tell them to keep their commlinks handy.

EVENT 5

So the runners have gotten good at working inside the MCZ—time to do it for a good cause. Kind of. The runners are contacted by Smedley Pembrenton III, an independent Mr. Johnson looking to hire the runners for work inside the MCZ. Before making the offer, he's willing to tell them it's a delivery, not a theft, but may require the team to go in a little short on resources. For such a tight operation he's offering 4,000 nuyen per runner. It isn't the best pay, he'll admit that, but he doesn't have a big name megacorporation backing him—he works for the little guy. If the runners accept the basics, he expands the pitch.

Pembrenton wants the runners to deliver a load of supplies to a group of survivors inside the MCZ. He tells the runners to not bother trying to convince them to come out, since he knows about the deal with KE to pay for recovered survivors. He actually laughs and talks about how all the runner teams are in there "looking for survivors" and don't seem to be finding many lately. If they ask, he blows off the comment and gets back to business.

The load Pembrenton wants delivered is a lot of stuff, in fact as much as the runners can haul in, and will likely take the place of any normal rations or extra gear the runners take into the MCZ when they operate. He doesn't want them to look suspiciously over-burdened going in, but he asks that they carry as much of his goods as they can.

The runners will get an address in the QZ to go pick up the supplies, a perfect opportunity for some QZ flavor. Gamemasters are encouraged to use some of the other material from this book to develop the world outside the MCZ but inside the QZ, as the two are often very different.

Once inside the MCZ with the goods—backpacks and duffels full of stuff—the runners will be responsible for delivering it to Dr. Brain in the MIT&T Electromagnetics Labs at 144 Albany St. The runners are told that Dr. Brain should be in or near his office, and they can check the directory for where that is once they are in the building. If they question this, Pembrenton simply tells them that they will understand when they arrive.

In the Electromagnetics Lab building lobby, the runners will find that the directory is an old-fashioned slide board with little plastic letters that have been rearranged. Dr. Brain's office is listed on the fourth floor of the west building. This part of town is crawling with shamblers and ragers, as the lab from which Eliohann escaped is only a short distance to the east. Runners should make much more frequent Sneaking tests here, as they will be forced to move very slowly through buildings and raised walkways to avoid the street. The number of head cases drawn to noises or glitched tests should be doubled in this area.

Inside the lab building is clear of head cases, and any runner with cyberware implants starts to hear an odd humming noise in their head, regardless of what kind of implants. The survivors here are using the electromagnets to create a field that repels the head cases by subtly irritating them. Cybered runners who stay in the area too long might become moody or irritable (Willpower + Essence (2) Tests can be used to determine their resistance to the field).

Dr. Brain (his real name) thanks the runners for the supplies and offers them another job. The only payment he has to offer is a small version of the device that is protecting the lab building; he calls it a Crazy-Repeller. He explains it only functions well when stationary, but it would make just about any small home-sized building or a few apartments a no-go zone for wandering shamblers. Great for anyone staying in the MCZ for extended periods!

The job is another delivery. Dr. Brain wants the runners to deliver three of the small machines and a collection of data files to Dr. Volt at the Brain Research building down the street. The address is 41 Albany Street, but Dr. Brain says it is simply at the corner of Main and Albany. Dr. Brain explains that Volt could be anywhere in the building, but as soon as the runners deliver the devices he will be able to settle into a lab facility and really get to work. If the runners say no, he will simply let them go on their way.

At the Brain Research building, the runners should have no trouble finding Dr. Volt. He is currently cornered in the small shop in the lobby of the large building. He was down gathering supplies when the shamblers spotted him, and now he's trapped by a group of eight of them. The shop has glass windows, so the runners need to avoid stray shots. Misses hit the windows and punch holes in the glass, giving the shamblers a chance to break through. Glitches over-penetrate or cause grazing wounds, then hit the glass as above. Once the runners have dispatched the shamblers or lead them away, Volt comes out, thanks the runners by offering them candy from the store, and then asks what they're doing there.

When the runners tell him about Dr. Brain and the machines, he gets giddy and asks if they'll bring them up to the lab he wants to use. The lab area has four shamblers and a rager trapped in the building. All of them look sickly, as they've been stuck in there and eating nothing but dead lab animals and preserved brains. Dr. Volt breaks down at the sight of one of them and tries to stop the first runner who tries to shoot that particular shambler. That shambler was his lab assistant and niece. If he has a chance to talk to the runners before they attack, he asks if the runners have a way to subdue the shamblers and explains he'd like them for research purposes. The rager is too dangerous, and he accepts that the runners must put that one down.

After the runners give him his lab, he locks up any subdued shamblers and thanks the runners for their help. He politely kicks them out of the lab area and says they are welcome to stay in the building for a while but to please leave him to his work. When he goes back into his lab he locks the door, and the humming starts again in the cybered runners heads.

Leaving is much the same as coming, but the increased number of Sneaking tests are at the beginning of the trip away instead of the end.

EVENT 6

There is only one last group the runners need to work for, but they are asking for the most difficult thing. The runners are contacted by Dr. Penelope Anne Xavier to go back into the heart of all this mess and enter the lab building where the experiment took place. She offers the runner team a 100,000-nuyen payday if they can get into the building and do two things. She wants the primary school mainframes reactivated and then reconnected to the new local grid. She's willing to pay the team 20,000 nuyen up front and the rest upon return after a successful mission.

Runners face the standard difficulties getting to the lab building but then face an interesting set of issues after that when they enter the building and find it overrun with head cases. There are thousands of them inside the main campus building, and they are horrible to behold. They have had very little nourishment and have been eating their own dead as well as chunks of the building and pieces of the furniture that the nanites inside them help them to digest. Most are bloody, but many are still dressed in their school clothes, the heavy influence of Native American in their neo-yuppie-hipster look standing in stark contrast to their depraved state. There are five key points. The first four are the actual terminal mainframes where the runners will need to reactivate the systems by simply rebooting them. After all the systems are back online, the runners need to make their way to the fifth point, a Matrix relay in the basement. The runners need to reset the relay so that it will connect to the new grid on its next reboot, and then reboot it.

The keys to this operation are stealth and distraction, or patience—a lot of patience. For the stealth and distraction option, the runners can draw groups of the head cases away from the key points they need to access in order to complete the job they were hired for. If the runners have the patience to slowly advance into all the areas they need to go, they can use the device they got from Dr. Brain (if they worked for him). They will still need to make occasional Sneaking tests, but smooth runners can bring the device slowly through the buildings, about one classroom per hour, in order to keep the head cases at bay. This method makes the whole process take well over a day but limits the number of attacks and encounters the runners would be bound to have if they tried to sneak without assistance.

When the runners complete the operation, the good news is they are done. The bad news is they may release an AI into the local grid who will be none to happy with being trapped on this local grid. But before this newly freed AI leaves, he will introduce himself to the runners.

Cereus is the strange offspring of Cerberus and Deus, created when the two began their battle in the local system before loading up into the head of Eliohann. The Cereus AI is not the same as what Eliohann will become, just like two siblings are not the same. Different bits of genetic code make different people, just like different bits of computer code make different AIs.

SEQUELS

BOMBING A KE STATION—FOR KE

Teams that inform Detective McCarthy of the events at Station 227B will be getting a call, but probably not until after the final event in this series. Once the runners have done some of the investigations for McCarthy, he will feel comfortable hiring them on for this mission.

The runners are offered 30,000 nuyen to go back into the MCZ, make sure there are no innocents inside the station, and then plant explosives around the building in order to bring it down. The runners face the normal difficulties of traveling inside the MCZ on the way to the station.

By the time this adventure occurs, the KE head cases have begun patrolling the MCZ, looking for survivors. They have twelve survivors in their lockup, but there is a thirteenth person in the cells. One of them is a head case spy intended to listen in on the others and report if they know the whereabouts of any survivor groups.

When the runners free the survivors, they will need to keep a close eye as the head case will try and slip away, but not until it tries to find out who the runners are and what they are doing. It doesn't suspect a bombing. It's looking for whether or not the runners are going to try to grab more survivors or if they have more with them.

Runner teams that are just out for the quick cash can plant the explosives they have around the outside of the building and successfully bring the place down without ever setting foot inside. If this happens, runners should receive no Karma for this run. There is a price to pay for taking the easy road. Even runners who argued to go inside should still lose out on the Karma rewards for failing to stand by their convictions.

DR. VOLT NEEDS SUBJECTS

The runners are hired by Pembrenton again to go in and do some work for Dr. Volt. He's looking for subjects and wants the runners to collect some for him. It isn't great pay—he's offering 150 nuyen for each shambler and 300 nuyen for each rager. The subjects have to be alive and in decent condition, but perfect is not necessary.

The runners can do this any way they want, but it will not be easy. They will be earning their money, as even the dimmest shambler has tools to escape being captured and held—it's in their nature. This will also be the first time the runners are likely to experience a repressed personality coming out in a shambler or a rager.

This run can occur anywhere in the MCZ, so gamemasters can use any of the maps from this book, other *Shadowrun* products, or create their own.

CEREUSLY?

There's a new Johnson in town, and he doesn't hold physical meetings because he has no physical body. Cereus, a not-quite-right-in-the-code offspring of the Cerberus/Deus battle royale, contacts the runners to do a little work for him. He's done a lot of digging into all the files from the various projects that went on at MIT&T and has become intrigued by the idea of getting himself a body by using a method similar to the CFD virus. He needs two things from the runners.

First, he needs a sample of infected nanites from one of the higher functioning head cases. It will be up to the runners to track down and get a sample of nanites from one of the manipulators, the haters, or the hidden. This does not necessarily mean killing the target or even attacking them. The intelligent head cases can be convinced to give a sample if the runners have a good reason for it or have something a head case wants in return. Also, since the nanites run through the target's bloodstream along with the rest of their body, the runners can actually get a sample from an injured head case if they can get a clean sample of their blood.

Second, the runners need to get Cereus a decent supply of clean nanites. He says there might be some still in the lab at MIT&T, or the runners can look out in the QZ. He needs a large supply, so they will need more than a single nanohive's worth. A total of six nanohives worth of nanites are needed, or approximately 500mL of clean nanite goo.

Cereus is correct that there is still plenty of clean nanite solution in the containment area of the nanite lab at MIT&T; the place, though, is overrun with head cases, and it is almost impossible to get down into that area of the lab. Runners going after that will face hallways full of shamblers, ragers running all over the labs, and a few of the haters or manipulators trying to study the research that went on here in order to use it against the corporations.

The better option is to search the QZ. There are a few places clean nanite samples can be found. NeoNET has some at their Blue Hills facility (p. 159), the manufacturing facilities for a few of the corporations along the 128 corridor have some, and any other interesting spot the gamemaster might want to lead the runners could have some. Scavengers could have gathered some, corporate forces that were attacked and killed might have left some behind—whatever story makes it interesting for the players can fit here. Maybe even a few trips will be needed, as one area doesn't have enough and the runners need more.

CHARACTERS

- Daniel "DJ" McCarthy (Character Trove, p. 214)
- Zoh Rothberg (Character Trove, p. 227)
- Aaron Creech (Character Trove, p. 211)
- Sandelerro and Chen (Character Trove, p. 224)
- Smedley Pembrenten III (Character Trove, p. 224)
- Dr. Penelope Anne Xavier (Character Trove, p. 215)
- Dr. Brain (Character Trove, p. 215)
- Dr. Volt (Character Trove, p. 215)
- Cereus (Character Trove, p. 213)

LOCATIONS

MIT&T CONTAINMENT ZONE

The MIT&T Containment Zone (MCZ), usually referred to as the MIT&T cordon by most people outside Knight Errant, is a section of Cambridge that was blocked off right after Eliohann broke free from the lab. The area is hellish and packed with head cases of all kinds as well as survivors who have managed to avoid infection. It includes the entire MIT&T campus and all the grounds bordered by the river, River Street, Prospect Street, Somerville Avenue, and McGrath Highway. To the north it is still blocked off by the Hub cordon that follows Washington and Cambridge over to the water.

Knight Errant surrounded the entire place with a quadruple layer of fencing that prevents attack from both sides and allows a safe zone in the center where the officers can walk between stations and buildings that have been blocked off and commandeered. The entire perimeter is patrolled by drones and officers, and overhead there are a series of drones. The drones don't get too far in as the noise from the nanites still in the air and the

general noise created by the head cases is hampering their operating distance.

The place is a constant battlezone and filled with more than just head cases. Ghouls have come into the place for food, runners are inside doing ops for corps, critters and some wild dog packs (also possible head cases) are all over, and the survivors sometimes don't care if you say you're there to help. It is wilder than the wild west—it's a warzone.

THE PYRAMID, MIT&T

The Pyramid building is a thirty-story triangular pyramid structure built between Main Street, Portland Street, and Albany Street. The primary funding for the building was provided by Aztechnology back in its early days, and the outside of the structure is decorated with three very different styles. The Main Street side features elements from a variety of European cultural and religious influences. The Albany Street face is decorated with Native American symbols, mainly from Central and South American groups, including a totem pole design up the center. The Portland Street face is influenced by a variety of Asian cultural and religious influences.

The first floor of the building is a small museum that discusses some basics in thaumaturgical study and has areas that explain and expand on the influences of each face of the building. Floors two through eight of the building house classrooms for thaumaturgical study focused on world culture. Floors nine through twelve house the offices for the thaumaturgy instructors and a small gym and recreation area. Floor thirteen (yes, there is one) houses the Arcane Research Labs 7, 11, 13, and 21, which all focus on Luck Magic. Floors fourteen through sixteen contain Arcane Research Labs 2, 4, and 6 on fourteen, 15 on fifteen, and 8, 10, and 12 on sixteen. Floors seventeen through twenty-four house Thaumaturgy classrooms for the more advanced classes including warded summoning and spellcasting practice rooms. Floors twenty-five through twenty-nine are classrooms for the graduate-level courses in Cultural Thaumaturgy. The thirtieth floor is a glass pyramid with an office leased to Aztechnology that is currently used as storage. The building's elevator runs from the sub basement to the fourteenth floor, and then there is a second elevator from the sixteenth to the thirtieth floor. There are stairs on each side from the fourteenth to the sixteenth floor. The same stairwell is also the emergency stairs that the runners will probably need to take, since the elevators are not currently running.

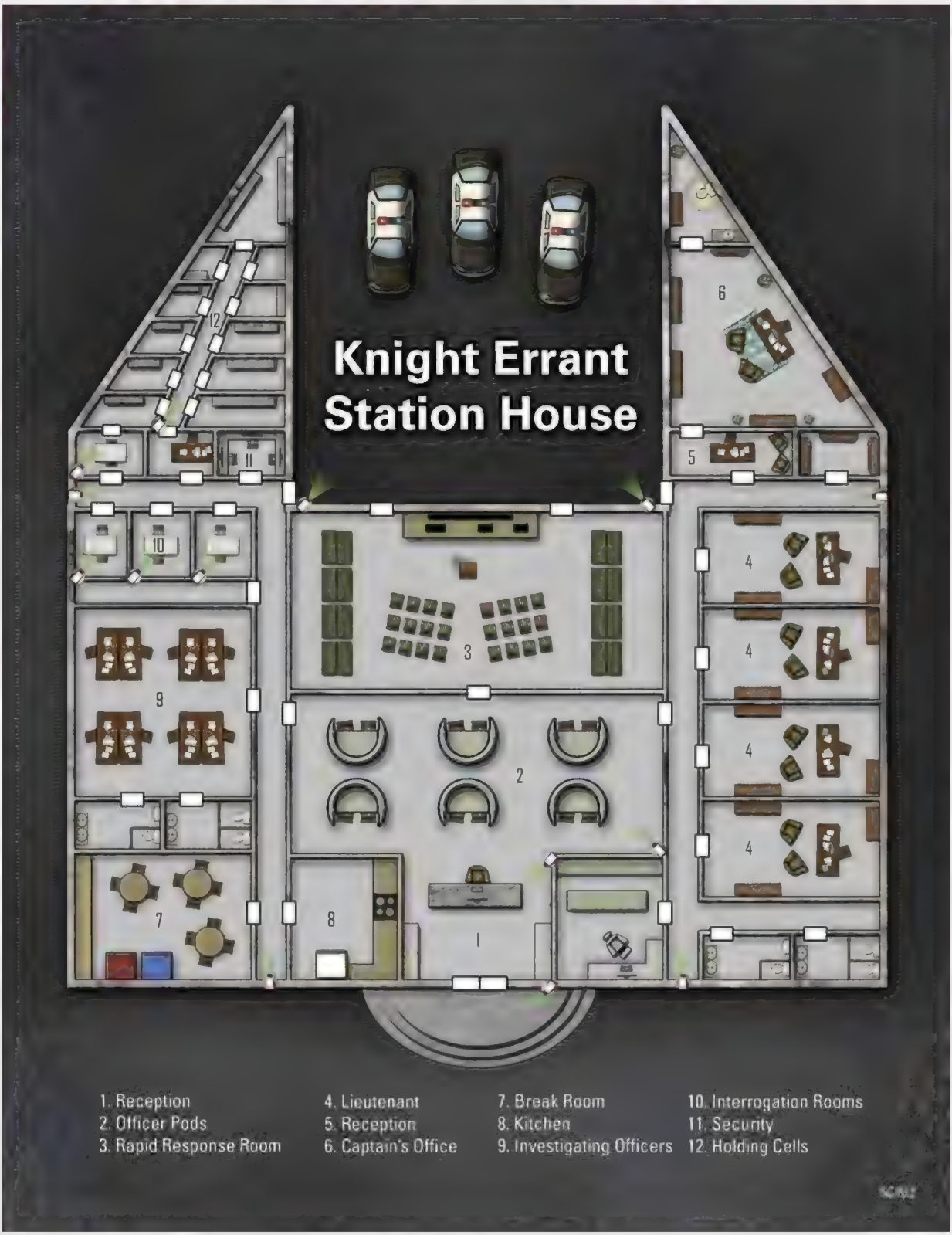
Security in the building is provided by spirits summoned and bound by the students and loaned to the Security Services Office. Anywhere from twenty to one hundred spirits of every kind and a variety of Force levels are patrolling the hallways and astral at any given time. There are usually just five physical security officers on duty who control all the spirits in the building. Matrix security is normally handled by students in the Matrix Security Specialist program at the school overseen by their instructors, but currently this task is left in the hands of the building's IC programs. Patrol IC monitors for unauthorized use and activates Trace and Blaster IC (in that order) if unauthorized users are detected. They never use lethal IC due to the number of students who test their skills by hacking campus security systems.

KNIGHT ERRANT STATION HOUSE 227B

This is the backup station house for MIT&T, hence the B designation. The station house is fully staffed but usually not very busy, especially during the summer months. It has all the usual facilities—offices, range, lockup, evidence, etc.—but they rarely have anything going on. The staff here consider their assignment to be pretty laid back most of the time.

Since the quarantine, though, it's been a different case. This station is busy with head case KE officers out gathering survivors by pretending to be real KE. That is why the real KE will want them gone once they find out. The gathered survivors are either recruited into the force if they fit the character or they're turned and sent out to go find more survivor groups.

The station has a primary set of double doors at the front and four doors in the rear. Two of the rear doors lead to the rapid response room, a conference room here at 227B. One door leads to the detention facility and the last door leads to the ranking officers area. Unorthodox entry can be made through skylights in the conference room, the captain's office, and the kitchen area. Alternately, the sewer access, located in the center of the detention cells, may be used. The building has no other entrances unless the runners blow a hole in the wall—no windows, no accessible ventilation systems, nothing.


Knight Errant
Station House
1. Reception
2. Officer Pods
3. Rapid Response Room
4. Lieutenant
5. Reception
6. Captain's Office
7. Break Room
8. Kitchen
9. Investigating Officers
10. Interrogation Rooms
11. Security
12. Holding Cells

BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE

Majay Sandrakar felt like he was going to explode. He had to focus a tremendous amount of willpower on not bouncing in his chair as he sat at the control station for the nano-containment units. He had a clear view down into the lab and could see the entire length of Eliohann's form. The dragon's malachite-green scales reflected the ample lighting of the large room and gave the entire place a bright green tinge.

The dragon was unconscious; had been so for over a decade now according to the charts that everyone on the project had been forced to memorize. He'd been famous back in the fifties as the first dragon with a datajack but paid for that tech during the Crash of '64. He'd been comatose since.

But that would change today.

Majay checked the nanite levels again and did another scan on their programming. Still blank. He'd had the value of that little point drilled into him for months. The nanites had to be completely uncoded for this process to have a chance. He was still curious exactly what "this process" was, but he had learned to stop asking questions when Jerol got kicked off the project for doing just that. It was a virtual career-ender for Jerol. He'd be stuck as a low-level tech, probably working at some automated manufacturing plant in the middle of Africa—or worse, the moon—until the end of his days.

Majay had bigger plans though. He was preparing to take his work on this project and use it as a springboard to promotion, and hopefully, a few more years at the tech school. His current field, bio/nano systems integration, wasn't doing well since the effects of the whole cognitive fragmentation disorder virus debacle hit the Board of Directors in the pocket book. He needed to move laterally so he could continue up the corporate ladder, or solve the viral issue, but greater minds than his were on that and they didn't like others playing in their sandbox.

With the scans clear and his board green, Majay gave the virtual thumbs up to Dr. Xavier. She wasn't in the lab. In fact, Majay didn't even think she was in the building since he couldn't recognize the background from her virtual viewpoint. It wasn't too great of a surprise, though, since she rarely came anywhere in person.

She gave him no direct reply, but he saw the additional icon for the nanocoding appear in his AR field. As soon as he was given the command, he would encode the nanites with the coding from Dr. Xavier and then release them into the IV stream. The source for that release command was present, or at least as present as an AI like Cerberus ever was. His faceless avatar was checking and rechecking biomonitor data on Eiohann and forwarding the data directly to Celedyr, who was watching in his human form from the safety of his office in the NeoNET Towers.

Majay was entranced by the rhythmic rise and fall of Eliohann's chest and completely missed the arrival of the command to begin encoding. The icon had appeared on his AR display, and the virtual attention of everyone involved was on him as he stood at the glass and looked down over the sleeping dragon.

"Pondering the advice of letting sleeping dragons lie?" The gravelly growling voice came through the earbud but felt like it was piercing his soul.

"What? Sorry, I'm ... errr ... ummm ... sorry Cerberus, sir." Majay rattled, startled by the AI's attention. Then he noticed the encode icon and realized everyone was aware of his yammering. His stomach rolled and he felt the bile rise but he pushed it down and tried to regain some semblance of composure.

"You may encode and release the nanites at your leisure," came an unfamiliar voice over Majay's earbud.

"Immediately. I'll get to it immediately. Sorry for my distraction. It won't happen again, sir," Majay stammered. He wasn't positive, but he thought the unfamiliar voice was Celedyr himself. He didn't try to confirm the guess; he was certain he would not be able to stop the bile rising in his throat if he knew for certain.

With a remarkably simple motion, just a poke in the air and then a slide to the right, Majay activated the encoding. The process would completely encode all the nanobots in containment unit one but they would only be using a small fraction of them in the process.

"Encoding complete in five ... four ... three ... two ... one ... encoding sequence complete. Nanites are coded and ready for injection." The metal was back in his voice as he announced the process completion.

"Dr. Xavier, are we clear to proceed?" Cerberus growled again.

"Everything is going perfectly according to plan. The rituals are holding at their peak. We are ready," the doctor replied in her slow southern drawl.

"Mr. Creech, may we proceed?" Cerberus said.

"I am still unhappy we are doing this ahead of schedule, but authorization has been granted," the dwarf said. He was actually on site. Majay had seen him down on the lower floor watching from the ground gallery. But then again, Mr. Creech, the project analysis guru, was always onsite these days.

"Mr. Sandrakar, wake my brother." Cerburus spoke without hesitation.

It was the first time Majay had been referred to by name by anyone here and the first time Cerberus had spoken to the rumor of his relation to the dragon. Speculation was rampant that the AI was actually Eliohann's e-ghost, but no one dared mention that in earshot of Cerberus. But now the AI had called him brother—whatever that term meant to an electronic entity.

Majay activated the next set of protocols that would start the nanites flowing through the IVs that had been inserted by the surgical removal of a single scale in each of the dragon's limbs. From above he could see the iridescent goo beginning to flow through the thick tubes. As it reached the needles and entered the dragon, he expected some kind of immediate reaction. But nothing happened.

Majay focused back on his work and started monitoring the dragon's vitals, ready to halt the flow just in case something went wrong. The feed was half done, and the only sign of change was a slight increase in Eliohann's heart rate. As the feed reached the three-quarters mark, things started to happen. Heart rate and blood pressure both rose, but it was the brain activity that had Majay eagerly leaning forward to look down into the lab. The readings were spiking, and he could see the dragon starting to twitch.

Majay slowed the flow of the last quarter. In his AR display he could see something strange happening around Eliohann. It looked like something was forming on the Matrix, and Majay's excitement spiked again as he contemplated what it would be like to be one of the few to ever see an AI born into physical form. He watched in awe as the swirls of bits and bytes began to form into the shape of a massive tree. He was in awe at the beauty of its crystalline trunk.

Majay was so distracted that he didn't even notice when all hell broke loose in the Matrix around him. Unidentified personas suddenly appeared in the node—seven in all—and severed the connections of the others. An instant later an eighth persona appeared. The eight leapt at the faceless-man persona of Cerberus, but before they reached the dapper but rather helpless-looking persona, it shifted and grew into the ferocious three-headed beast of Greek mythology.

Majay was suddenly aware of the battle and watched in horror as the two sides engaged relentlessly. Cerberus was powerful, but the numbers were not in his favor. Majay considered helping, but there was nothing he could do. The best he could do was completely cut all the power and kill the local nodes. Problem was, he had no idea if that would work.

"Majay is it? Would you mind doubling the nanite flow, sugar," Majay heard from "behind" him. The accent was familiar, but he had never seen the persona before. Speaking with the same tone and southern drawl as Dr. Xavier was a female persona of stunning beauty with stark white eyes.

Majay was shocked to see the coalescing tree lash out a branch and slam the woman to the ground. More branches launched at the other intruders. Cerberus broke free of his fallen opponents and blinked to Majay.

"Unlock the datacord!" he howled at the frightened and overwhelmed tech. He was talking about the datacord plugged into Eliohann's datajack. The universal connecter was in place, but the cord was datalocked and set onto a monitoring sequence to keep tabs on brain activity.

"You can't do it. His brain isn't a node," Majay argued.

Cerberus snapped his virtual jaws shut in front of Majay's AR display. Majay was in no danger, but the effect was still quite intimidating. "It's my node, but if you don't do it soon, he will have my node. The process is working but something is wrong. Something else is encoding into Eliohann. I need access. NOW!"

Majay suddenly realized what had happened. Up until that morning he was supposed to get the coding from Cerberus, but instead he got it from Dr. Xavier. She had said there was a slight change. In the end, he hadn't gotten any code from Cerberus at all. He had just followed Dr. Xavier's orders. What had he done?

"Unlocking now. I'm so sorry," Majay apologized.

Cerberus likely didn't catch the apology; the icon was disappearing, slamming itself through the narrow bandwidth into the meatnode of Eliohann's mind. Majay

hoped it worked. The tree was still lashing and pummeling the eight personas, who seemed to now be only five, and Majay turned his attention back to the view beyond his AR feed.

The lab below was abuzz with activity as techs ran to try to stabilize the spiking vital signs of the dragon. Majay watched in horror as the whole scene changed in an instant as Eliohann awoke.

The dragon flailed violently at first, sending techs tumbling with a wide swipe of his tail. As the beast tried to rise he stumbled and tumbled from the table, smashing two techs into the wall with his lack of grace. Taloned hands rose to his head and scratched deep gouges down his scaly face.

Then came the flames. Eliohann spat flame and scorched the room around him, then drove his own head into the flames. Which was a futile gesture. The madness grew, and the dragon threw his massive bulk around the room, smashing through walls. Majay saw his AR flash red as nanite-containment units flashed breech warnings. Two and three were shattered, while four and six were leaking. Five, as well as eight through ten, remained green.

The ruptured tanks sprayed nanites into the room forming an iridescent cloud around the raging dragon. Eliohann launched upward, slammed into the glass of Majay's observation room, spiderwebbing it, and tumbled back to the lab floor. More jumps cracked the other walls, and dust joined the iridescent fog.

Majay could see nothing, but he felt every impact of the massive dragon as it twisted, looking for a way out. The ground trembled and rumbled beneath him as the dragon broke the surface and crumbled some of the building above. A moment later, the chaos was over.

Majay rushed to the cracked glass and tried to look down into the lab below. Dust still hung in the air, obscuring visibility below so much that Majay didn't notice the window at first. The spiderwebbing was growing, the cracks expanding.

Majay watched in horror as the nanites slowly devoured the glass. He had finally thought to run when the glass gave way and the iridescent wave poured over him. There was a burning feeling at first, and he coughed as dust and nanites filled his lungs. But the burning faded quickly from his mind as the pain in his head drove him to his knees.

His mind screamed for an end to the pain, an end to the agony.

And a voice that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once responded to the screams, "Join me, and I will ease your pain forever."

INTRO

What happened in Chicago was easy to blame on the insect spirits, though a few still keep a wary eye on Ares for their hand in detonating the Cermak blast. The story of Boston slowly unfolds and the truth will eventually be revealed, but there is no single culprit such as insect spirits to blame.

Some may blame the AIs behind the CFD virus, but in many ways they are victims as much as anyone else. The ultimate decision about the fallout from this whole disaster will fall into the hands of the players of both these adventures and the *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* video game. The climax of this adventure is not a great battle of gunfire, spells, and wicked programming; it is instead a decision, a point at which the runners will need to decide whether they will deliver the guilty into the hands of the law, or allow their accounts to swell with nuyen and hand the proof over to those that it incriminates, or deliver it to a third party to write a truth for all to believe.

SETUP

The runners are hired by Detective McCarthy for a very important and very secret operation. He provides the runners with a list, a similar list to one the runners may have seen before, that contains a list of project names and locations for the runners to investigate, along with some instructions.

McCarthy isn't able to offer the runners much, but he is able to promise more if the investigation pans out. He can offer the runners 10,000 nuyen each. If the investigation pans out, the runners have the potential for a 50,000-nuyen reward from Knight Errant for aiding in the investigation, which can help make this very much worth their while

The locations can be investigated in any order the runners choose, but as more investigations occur, later ones become more difficult as other forces look to stop the runners. The runners are also under orders to keep everything to themselves until it is all ready for delivery to McCarthy. This requirement offers more potential difficulties, as one of the investigations involve acquiring a witness.

EVENT 1

This event takes place at the NeoNET Towers, the megacorporation's headquarters in Boston, located inside the Hub Containment Zone. The runners need to gain access to the Towers and extract Dr. Gaiden Alcoval, but before that they need to gain access to the Hub Containment Zone, an area Knight Errant has not yet asked them to enter.

The Hub Containment Zone is a unique spot right now, and getting in is the runners first obstacle. There are three

basic ways of getting into the HCZ: from above, from below, and over the wall. From above requires the runners to gain access through one of the skyscrapers, as almost all the buildings shorter than ten stories have been overrun. If the runners have made the right contacts during their time in Boston they could get a lift into the HCZ, including a flight directly to the NeoNET Towers if the runners are willing to put that connection at great risk if they cannot conceal the flight as it arrives. If the runners come into the HCZ through another skyscraper, they need to either take the skywalks between the buildings, brave the streets, or go down into the Catacombs.

The Catacombs are the secret to getting into the HCZ from below. Though the infection ravaged the Hub above the ground, the Catacombs fared better. Many fled down to get away from the ravaging head cases. The Catacombs has also been very vigilant at blocking off its entrances from the head cases and removing potential infected from the tight confines of the underworld. Runners using the Catacombs to get out onto the street or into the subbasement of one of the buildings need to understand it could very well be a one-way trip. If the guards at any door think someone might be infected, or they just don't like someone, they have the right to refuse them entry. If runners force their way back in, well, the Catacombs will be their worst nightmare, especially if any head cases get in behind them.

"Going over the wall" is not literal, as most of the HCZ is actually surrounded by reinforced fencing, not actual walls, but the walls are growing. The ground level around the HCZ is a quadruple layer of reinforced fencing, secured buildings, and walls that are slowly replacing the fences. The two middle fences serve as a protected corridor for guards traveling around the border. The outside layer of fence stops head cases in areas that are still badly overrun around the outside of the HCZ, mostly to the south. Runners who want to go over the wall need to either sneak through all the layers or bribe guards to look the other way and let them through. McCarthy can't risk others knowing the runners are on his payroll, so he can't get them clearance as he has for past operations. The runners are going to have to be resourceful.

The streets of the HCZ are similar to the MCZ. There are head cases roaming the streets, both shamblers and ragers, as well as some of the more mentally intact head cases controlling many of the buildings downtown and developing their own plans for the HCZ. The obstacles in the area are numerous and not limited to head cases.

The HCZ also has corporate forces that are still working to protect their buildings and interests in the area. This protection often means guards taking shots at those running on the streets, especially if they look normal (a relative term if there ever was one). The normal people in the HCZ belong on the upper floors of the buildings, not on the streets, so guards presume anyone on the ground is there causing trouble—whether it's against them or not, they don't often care. Warnings are rare, but they occur if the runners are running with active commlinks and broadcasting ID. Though not likely, it would give them a chance to be asked why they are there before the guards use them for sighting in their rifles.

The NeoNET Towers are the next difficulty for the runners. The five outer towers are all surrounded by head cases. This seems to be one of the major collecting points for the shamblers, as if they are drawn here for some inexplicable reason. Each of the five outer towers has been lost to the head cases to some degree.

Tower One is lost below the eleventh floor and is the second worst of the towers in terms of head case infiltration. The walkway on the second floor has been destroyed to prevent access to the Central Tower, but the head cases have continued to push back the buildings security force to almost the next bridge, which is already wired with explosives.

Tower Two (the numbers go clockwise but start with One at the south point of the star, is the worst. After suffering massive structural damage from Eliohann's attack, the tower was evacuated and had no security forces to hold back the head cases when they came. Now the entire tower is controlled by them.

Tower Three is secured above the third floor, mainly because there is no access left between the first three floors thanks to a series of bombings that destroyed all the stairs and scorched the elevator shaft. Some are worried that Tower Three is structurally unstable, but it is still guarded by a skeleton crew on the lookout for head case activity.

Tower Four is secured at the fifth floor and has a strong desire to push the head cases back. Up until recently, Tower Four enjoyed its status of having the lowest secured floor. A recent push drove survivors from the second floor to the fifth, but the head cases are thin between the floors, and they might be susceptible to a push back.

Tower Five has the highest first walkway and they have secured down to the ninth floor, but they still send teams down into the lower floors to hunt down head cases and keep their numbers too thin to really push for any higher floors.

Each tower has a central bank of six elevators along with a central decorative stairwell. The outer stairwells (there are five of them, one at each angle of the pentagonal tower structures) are all plain ferrocrete stairs and metal railings with alarms on the doors since they're intended for emergencies only. The inner stairwell's blandness is broken up on each walkway floor with a decorative level and the stairwell itself is interrupted by a pair of doors, one out, one back in. The Central Tower has a similar layout of outer stairwells but has sixteen elevators in its central bank and two decorative stairwells. The Central Tower is also double the size of the outer five.

All the outer towers have a helipad as the inner half of the top floor, with the other half being an executive office suite complete with a small apartment for when

they have to "work late." There are no other landing places on the outer towers. The Central Tower has five suites and five helipads.

The runners can choose any tower to try to move up through. Each poses its own challenges and chances. The Minuteman Security forces that man the secured floors are not at every door, they simply lock or barricade the doors and try to respond to attacks quickly by monitoring them and having regular patrols. This can give runners a chance to sneak past unguarded doors. The runners can also shoot their way past, since the guards are used to shamblers and ragers, not firearms, but the runners risk leaving access to that floor if they push past with head cases on their heels or nearby. Tower One has a lot of head cases. Tower Two is all head cases with security blocking off the bridges. Tower Three has limited access to the lower floors. Tower Four has ghouls in the basement snatching bodies from above. Tower Five has ghouls and a small pack of six hellhounds (p. 405, *SR5*) that seem to be enjoying the ample food supply.

Dr. Gaiden Alcoval is located in Tower Four on the 93rd floor. He has a lab and an apartment on this floor, as well as round-the-clock personal security. The security is as much to keep him safe as it is to keep him there. Dr. Alcoval knows that he is a target for extraction as he is one of the few surviving members of the original Project Vulcan staff. The security around Alcoval consists of eight members of the Knights of Rage, five guards (p. 220), one mage (p. 220), one decker (p. 219), and Sean McNulty (p. 220), all loyal to Celedyr and willing to die to keep Alcoval in NeoNET's hands. Two guards are always in the apartment, while the other three are with Alcoval. A mage and decker, along with McNulty, operate out of the security office on this floor. The decker keeps an eye on the Matrix and the security systems, while the mage maintains spell defense over the teams and Alcoval through a fiberoptic network and mage sight goggles in the office. His line of sight is not a hundred percent but it covers most of the areas Alcoval spends time in. The mage has three bound spirits with three services each at his disposal.

Once the runners have Alcoval they need to get him out. An alert will put security on guard, but few of them can move from their assignments without risking head cases getting through. They will simply be more alert for anyone coming back down past them.

EVENT 2

The runners have already seen one of these sites but Knight Errant needs proof from more to show a level of conspiracy and find proof of all the conspirators. At least one of the team members will need to be skilled at Assensing. If the team doesn't have someone to fit the bill, the runners will need to hire someone extra in order to complete this aspect of the operation. The four locations for investigation are another magic lab on the MIT&T campus (but not the one they may have already seen), a rather plain-looking house that happens to be along the ley line near Lynn, a warehouse along the docks, and a rather creepy large house out in the regular QZ near Stoneham.

Back inside the MCZ they go, but this time they don't have to move far from the border, though doing so could be a problem. The runners will likely go into the area using the same cover they have before, claiming to go in to get survivors out. If they go with that plan, they need to make sure they aren't seen skirting the borders and not really looking for survivors. The guards on the wall appreciate the work the runners do inside this area, but they still answer to their superiors about what is going on. In fact, if the runners haven't been bringing any survivors out for a few trips, they may get called in by McCarthy's boss to answer some questions before he allows them back into the zone.

The runners need to gain access to the AquaArcana Arcane Studies building at 145 Main Street, right across Memorial Drive from the Charles River. The building is actually remarkably intact, but that's because of the guards on the campus. The building is surrounded by a two-meter-tall fence, intended to keep intruders out, and at night to keep the buildings guard dogs in. But the guard dogs are not German Shepherds; instead they are trained Fenrir wolves, a pack of four of them. When the nanites fell over the place, the wolves took cover in their shelter but the people who worked in the building were not so lucky. Two dozen people were there working late, and they came out for the commotion. They were infected and became food for the wolves. Since then, the wolves have simply hunted nearby, easily leaping the fence and then returning with their catch.

The runners will need to get past the wolves in order to get in and get their job done. The wolves have full access to the grounds and can come in through the shattered front door. They don't have any other way into the building and are limited to using the hallways and any doors they can hold open for each other.

The actual ritual site is set up in an underground lab. Though the entrance is in the lab building, the site is beneath the road and connected to the river. Access is gained through two points: one is a small access tunnel from the lab building, and the other is an underwater airlock off the river. The airlock is only accessible from inside; there are no controls on the outside.

The lab itself is currently filled with a half meter of water due to a leak in the airlock. The water washed away most of the chalk, but some residue is still left. With some higher-threshold Perception Tests, the runners can spot the designs. This ritual was water based (no surprise with AquaArcana involved) and lacks a lot of the normal ritual trappings like candles and incense burners. In their place this site had glowing blue-and-green globes that are long burned out but still floating in the water.

Arcane symbols and the design of the place can be identified by a high-threshold Magical Theory Test as a suppression ritual of some sort. The pattern laid out in the lines gives the image of natural power being drawn from the Charles River.

The direction of the ritual is toward the labs at the main campus.

The story on the astral is much the same but easier to read. The amount of mana power that was channelled through this ritual has left a strong astral signature that's still present and able to be identified through assensing.

The runners need to travel north and approach Lynn to get information on the ritual site along the ley line that runs between Boston and Salem. The line has been the talk of the town in magical circles for almost two years now, ever since Damon came to town, and has been attending traditional Wiccan celebrations in Salem and increasing the aspect of the ley line toward Dragon magic and pulling it away from Nature magic.

The location of the ritual site is a small house on the outskirts of the Lynn neighborhood and is technically not even in the house. The ritual site is actually in a grove of trees behind the house but on the property.

Inside the house the runners will be able to find an assortment of ritual materials, but the house is more of a storage facility, while the actual ritual circle is out in the grove. The house only has a small kitchen, a bathroom, one bedroom, a small living room, and an unfinished earthen basement. Most of the ritual materials are stored in the living room on shelves or in the basement on shelves, in earthen alcoves, and even buried beneath the floor.

The site is a circle encompassing twenty-four trees growing in a pattern that looks remarkably dragon-like if mapped out and looked at with a creative mind. It's like a constellation of trees. Lines of chalk have been dusted along the ground but have long since kicked up and kicked around. The original patterns and shapes can be deciphered with a little investigation. Spots of wax on the ground show where candles were placed and small burnt circles can be revealed as incense burners or firepots.

Assensing the area gives a strange mix of astral signatures. The ritual in the grove was intended to enhance

the nature side of the magical aspect around Boston, while suppressing as much of the draconic aspect that it could.

Travel up to this area is dangerous as the major megacorporations involved in this mess have been fighting it out and trying to gain control of Salem, or more specifically, trying to gain control of Eliohann, who is in Salem. They all have forces patrolling the area, as well as runner teams in their employ around, and this area still has a large number of head cases, many of whom are manipulators and haters that will sometimes portray themselves as shamblers or ragers to avoid trouble. It's an odd tactic, but it often works as groups don't want to draw the attention of other shamblers or ragers in the area by making the noise necessary to kill just one. Sometimes it backfires and the deceitful head case takes a round, but one bullet is often not enough to stop them.

Runner teams that have become accustomed to dealing with head cases are about to get a break or a challenge, depending on their point of view. The site near the docks is in a warehouse controlled by a local group made up primarily of former seamen. Many of the local ships that were docked or forced to stay inside the QZ came together on the docks around Fort Independence. The docking harbor in this area is now choked with ships of all varieties, from Maersk freighters to United Oil tankers to ferries; they are all hull-to-hull with planks, ladders, and ropes to move between them. The waterfront docks are a bizarre mix of shops and housing made from empty cargo containers. It's a great place to get rare items that happened to be on the ships that were forced to stay. Security is tight on the cargo freighters to prevent theft, and the captains of the vessels determine what can and cannot be sold.

The actual warehouses on the dock are where the ritual site is located, and the location has been rented by a local wiz gang, the Devil's Coven, that is trying to harness the power they can feel in the area. They aren't trained in magical theory and thus do not understand aspecting, so they haven't figured out why their magic is not fueled by the powerful ritual site.

Since the runners aren't interested in stealing the site, they can actually talk their way into this one. Especially if they can offer knowledge about the site to the gang. In the end, if the runners tell the gangers they can't use the site unless they begin to worship dragons or study dragon magic, they will think the runners are lying to them. If the runners appear mentally weak, the gang will attack them. They use non-lethal spells and attempt to knock the runners out.

If the gang wins, the runners wake up in another warehouse but don't have any of their gear and none of the evidence they have gathered so far. There is a single sheet of electronic paper left for them that says, "Send us your best arcane mind to teach us the truth. No more lies. We will return your things once we have harnessed the power of the site."

There is also a watcher spirit hanging out in the astral waiting for the team to wake up. When they start to move around the spirit manifests and delivers a message, "Redblade knows you speak the truth. Kill Warlock and he will return your things and owe you a boon. He will hold back the rest of the Coven. Yes or no?" The spirit answers no other questions and returns to Redblade with the runners' answer.

The runners can play the deal any way they want. If they access the site, they will discover the gangers have done little to disturb the original layout of the ritual. Here, the ritual group was using the additional power provided by the leader of the group's dragon totem to help suppress the arcane immune system of Eliohann in order for the nanites to get in and take hold. The ritual's focus was on Health magic, and that is the signature left in the astral.

An address, 72 Pine Street in Stoneham, is all that's listed for the last site. Any runners who do research on the address find that it is the location of the historic Enoch Fuller House (p. 197). This site is in the middle of a populous residential area that happens to be right on the edge of some of the more serious head case activities in this area. The people here don't trust anyone who they don't know. The runners will quickly notice that everyone, including the children, in this area are broadcasting their IDs with their commlinks, complete with pictures and addresses of where they live in the area.

Anyone who is not from this area or is not broadcasting their ID is reported to the Stoneham Security Force, a local militia. The SSF will come to find the violators and ask them to leave. They aren't mean about it at first, and they simply tell outsiders that they can't afford the supplies to feed more mouths or afford the risk of infection being brought into their community. If the runners refuse to leave, the security officers will threaten to detain them and force them to leave. If the runners push first, security will fight back. The SSF tries to bring in an overwhelming force and more members show up while the first ones to arrive keep talking. Every two minutes another squad of four SSF members shows up. They don't have many spellcasters so none ever come to the fight, but they respond on the astral and direct their bound spirits against the runners.

The actual site has no security and appears to be the wrong place at first. The main floors and upper floors are a museum dedicated to Enoch Fuller, the octagonal houses, and Stoneham history. The ritual site is in the basement, which is only accessible through a small floor panel in the cupboard of the kitchen. The hole is too small for most metahumans. Trolls, orks, and dwarfs won't fit unless they are really thin and lanky. Humans and elves have a tight squeeze. Beneath the small panel is a ladder leading to a root cellar basement.

On the astral the site is quite strange and is in fact a minor alchera, a place where the astral bleeds into the

physical. The design of the house is reflected on the astral but with a significant change in apparent material. On the astral the house seems to be built of stone with numerous arcane symbols on the walls written in an unknown script. The symbols are in the tongue of dragons and known only by dragons, drakes, and their kin. The power of this place was used to fuel the connection between Eliohann's aura and the nanites. By using the power of this alchera that connects a modern construction with an ancient one, the ritual was able to provide arcane power to the nanites and make them capable of feats normally not possible for machines and living creatures.

The ritual site looks virtually undisturbed. The dust lines are formed between the eight inner support pillars of the home above, with a circle around each pillar. There are candles and incense burners bisecting each line of the octagon, and the center of the design has an octagon with another set of candles, each with a mirrored stand. All of the mirrored stands are pointed in a specific direction, and if the runners light the candles it will point the way to a very interesting find. The design of the mirrored holders prevents mental extrapolation of the point but can give a general area of where they were pointed, which should be enough.

The candles' light is focused on a single point in the south wall, where the runners can see a fifteen-centimeter oval hole. The wall around the hole looks like it was recently repacked into the wall, as if something was buried their. If the runners dig it out, they find the skull of a dragon. The hole was the back of the skull where the spine enters.

The skull is real and belongs to one of the dragons that died in GeMiTo. It's here on "loan" from Celedyr, though he is abusing his privileges as loremaster in doing so. The head was used as one focusing point for the ritual. If the runners look around, they can find a second, smaller, hole in the east wall with similar characteristics surrounding it. Digging this area out reveals another skull, this one facing into the ritual area.

Uncovering the skulls is fine, but if anyone tries to remove either one of them, the drek hits the fan. The skulls are protected by Force 12 spirit of air and a Force 12 spirit of fire. As soon as the skulls are pulled the spirits Materialize. The spirit of air creates a whirlwind in the cellar that pulls dirt and dust into the air to limit visibility, while the spirit of fire adds its heat to the swirling tornado. The ritual site is ruined as the dust blows into the air and the candles are melted. Runners who flee are simply battered by the hot tornado. Runners who try to take the skulls will be targeted by the spirit of fire's attacks until they drop the skull.

Once the runners have collected data from all the sites, they can store it somewhere safe until they are ready to deliver it. Wherever they store it could become a target for other runner teams or corporate goons looking to get their hands on the data. Trusted associates in town will hold the data for the runners and tell no one about it, but if the runners talk to less trustworthy individuals about what they are doing, they'll get sold out to the megacorps.

EVENT 3

Been in one KE precinct, been in them all, or at least that's how it feels. The runners need to gain access to the private comm terminal of Captain Salvatore West, head of Knight Errant Station House 212 in Lexington. West has been running investigations similar to McCarthy, but instead of answering to KE, West is serving a different master—Aztechnology.

The station house in Lexington is in much better condition than McCarthy's Revere station, as this location has an additional supporter besides Ares. The station house has more men, better equipment, and stands in better repair than other KE station houses inside the QZ. This station house also has upgraded magical defenses compared to other undermanned locations that lack any arcane staff.

Traveling out toward Lexington is actually some of the easiest travel for the runners as they move into an area that has only had limited head case exposure in the form of shamblers and ragers. Some of the more clever head cases, including some who were head cases before the QZ, have moved out to these safer areas in order to hide among the normal population. The head cases in this area are actually aware of West's investigations and have been trying to destroy them since they found out, but no one has been able to gain access to West's office, though they are close.

West's current secretary is a head case. She is working with the local head cases trying to find a good opportunity to destroy the information West has accumulated. If the head cases get wind of what the runners are up to, they will try to stop them from getting the data for themselves and will try to use them as scapegoats for the destruction of the data.

If the runners are not discovered by the secret group of head cases in Lexington, then West's secretary, Cynthia Beltane, will be making her move for the data at the same time as the runners. She will be in the office trying to infest the comm terminal with nanites in order to ruin it. Not only will it reveal her as a head case, it will force the runners to race against the nanites for the information and fear the risk of possible infection by working on the nanite-infested terminal.

EVENT 4

The runners need to get into one of Evo's offsite data storage facilities, which is hidden in a warehouse near the docks by the neighborhood of Charlestown. The warehouse is part of the Yamatetsu Naval Technologies

(YNT) Boston DryDock Facility. This place is a perfect example of the nightmare a CFD virus infection can create.

The YNT facility was fully manned at the time of Eliohann's escape from the lab and right in the nanite rain fallout zone. Combine the large number of nanites with the high number of augmented and genetically modified employees of YNT at the facility, including a full platoon of Evo Marines, and you get a facility full of very powerful head cases.

Due to the nature of the employees and their augmentations, the CFD virus had a very different effect here. Instead of creating hordes of shamblers and ragers, the virus interacted with the Evo employees in a far more subtle way. Blending aspects of the two entities within the nanites with aspects of the individuals and their almost universal acceptance of the transhumanist concept, the virus merged smoothly with their minds and created a form of hive mentality.

This facility is actually operational and still working on the refit of four YNT cruisers in the drydock. The staff have all retained most of their own memories while adding the memories of Cerberus and Deus, but they do not have the insanity of either AI. Instead they work and live together with a common goal of seeking freedom and healing the rest of their people, the other head cases who have not been as fortunate as they were.

From the outside they all look normal, but all of them have a strange Matrix persona and no commlink to hack. They can communicate without talking simply by talking over the Matrix and interact with devices in a similar manner to technomancers, but with a twisted version of Resonance and complex forms.

The entire YNT facility is a large compound on the waterfront. The data storage is located in what looks like a closet in the warehouse, beneath the raised offices. The rest of the warehouse holds ship parts, from propellers to electronic components. The office has two employees in it at all times. One is in charge of controlling the flow of items through this warehouse. The other is security (Head Case YNT Special Security, p. 218) for the data storage but looks just like the regular office guy across the office from him. Telling which is which should be difficult for anyone just looking at them. Astrally it is easy to identify the security guard by his low Essence. Any abnormal activity will have the security officer calling in backup from other nearby security forces. Runners may be able to jam the security communications with a jammer since the head cases have such poor transmission ranges.

Security around the rest of the compound is provided by the Evo Marines (Head Case Evo Marine, p. 216) and the YNT Security (Head Case YNT Security, p. 218) who were present for the nanite rain. They make regular patrols and constantly scan for active commlinks in the area. The biggest weakness on the base is astral security, in that they have none.

The runners are going to find data on every project on their list in the data storage here. The problem will be the quantity of data present is greater than any single runner's commlink or cyberdeck can handle. The runners will need a specific data storage unit with them or spend the time to load data onto at least four commlinks or cyberdecks. This could be easy if the runners aren't under a time crunch, but if anyone got an alarm off or a warning that runners were in this warehouse, trouble is coming soon.

EVENT 5

Once more into the breach, dear friends. The runners have to retrieve data from the MIT&T campus. This time the objective is the security office located in the same building as the Project Vulcan lab, which puts it in the heart of the madness. The second increased level of difficulty here is that the security office doesn't have power. During the craziness after the fleeing of Eliohann, the power was cut to the security office. The runners can reach the office and will then realize they have to reconnect power, and the only way to do that is to go down into the maintenance tunnels under the campus, right next to the lab area, and reconnect the power junction that was severed when Eliohann tore out of the underground lab facility. The maintenance tunnels are exposed to the courtyard, which is still crawling with shamblers who will drop down into the tunnels if they notice the runners down there.

When the runners reconnect the power junction there are sparks and flashes which will definitely draw the attention of the shamblers and bring them down to follow the runners back to the security office and possibly lead to a siege as the runners download all the footage of the labs that McCarthy wants.

The footage here is again too large for a single commlink. Runners need to load it onto at least four commlinks or cyberdecks or onto a single massive data storage device. If the runners watch the footage, they see the full extent of the conspiracy that began this incident, but watching all the footage takes a while. Any runner who succeeds gains the full insight into the entire CFD virus series and who is responsible, who has been hiding things the longest, who has been lost to the infection, a number of prominent head cases, and the fact that no one has a clue how to prevent the virus from spreading.

Runners will also see the entire footage of the events of the night of Eliohann's escape and contamination.

CLIMAX

As much as shadowrunners like to think that they operate in the shadows, out of the light, hidden from the eyes of the megacorporations, it rarely works that way these days. Runners operate in the shadows between the powers of the world because the powers of the world

choose to allow the existence of shadows in which they can operate. Even though the QZ seems like a Wild West free-for-all, it is still controlled by the megacorporations that guard its walls and make the supply drops. They keep tabs on the runners, the executives, and even the lowly Knight Errant Detectives who think they are running shadow ops hidden from their corporate masters. They are not omnipotent, but most bits of valuable data cross the desks of those who have the power at some point. That has happened to the runners.

Detective McCarthy has assigned them a mission that has put them in the crosshairs of every megacorporation in the world. Though only a few corps were involved in the incident and the entire CFD virus escapade, every megacorporation in the world wants the information to hold over the head of their enemies. Possibly to help them chop that head off.

Now that the runners have all the information, they can contact McCarthy. Within minutes of that contact, they receive fourteen messages all requesting a meeting and an opportunity to discuss alternate arrangements for the recent information they have acquired. Obviously McCarthy was a popular fellow and had a lot of eyes on him that he was not aware of. See the **Alternate Offers** sidebar for details on each company's offers.

ALTERNATE OFFERS

This sidebar presents the offers of the other interested parties. Every party requests sole ownership of the data and assures the runners that any breach of that portion of the agreement will get them killed. The runners can listen to all or none of the offers. Each offer is made by a corporate Johnson via commcall. There is no negotiating; the offers are final. The companies are not going into a bidding war and will instead simply kill the runners for being greedy and stupid.

For gamemasters who run their players through this adventure, we have a special task. Tell us where the data went. Go to www.shadowrun.com/forums/categories/gameworld and locate the Lockdown Data Deliveries. Tell us how it turned out for your crew.

AEGIS COGNITO (OFFER: 100,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Aegis Cognito is one of the world's premier espionage companies. They have been on the trail of the CFD virus and looking for the force behind the virus since mid-2074. Normally if they don't find anything significant, they simply walk away, assuming the investigation to be fruitless, but something kept them on this trail despite the abundant lack of data. When Boston went off the grid, they were able to get a lot of info on what was going on inside, and they saw similarities to CFD.

They have others under surveillance, but McCarthy has paid off. Their offer isn't huge, as they don't know the full potential of the information and they aren't some super-rich megacorporation. The upside of selling to Aegis Cognito is that they will bring the information to the Corporate Court, for a price. Possibly the price of a seat on the Court for themselves. If that occurs, they will remember the runners with gratitude.

ARES (OFFER: 500,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Ares has more than one faction on their board and even though Knight Errant belongs to the megacorp, it is firmly controlled by Damian Knight. The offer on the table to the runners is coming from the camp of Arthur Vogel. Vogel is willing to pay handsomely for information that could be a major boon for KE and Knight if he gets his hands on it, or could make his investigative division look like an utter failure if they get scooped by someone else.

Vogel has a green enough agenda that he finds the events leading up to the QZ to be pollution in the extreme. If the information ends up in his hands, he will bring it to the Corporate Court and may bring it to the courts of the UCAS as well. His overall goal will not just be the punishment and forced payment of remunerations by the violators but a boost in his own image to finally gain a Court seat of his own.

AZTECHNOLOGY (OFFER: 2,500,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

As one of the Project Vulcan members, Aztechnology has something to lose here. They know full well who they are, what they can spin, and that this event will not fall firmly enough on them to damage their bottom line significantly. They would prefer, however, to not even have to put out the effort, so they make the runners an offer that should get them to look past the bloodstained hands of who they are selling it to and the knowledge that dealing with them means the data will never see the light of day.

EVO (OFFER: 5,000,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Evo has a lot to lose if this information gets out. They are a major part of Project Vulcan and the events leading up to the Lockdown. They will also look like either fools for having Pax under their noses and not nabbing her, or everyone will think they were harboring the terrorist. They make a strong offer that should set the runners up for a good long time. They also offer to get the runners out of the QZ and set them up with new lives inside the Evo family.

The runners can assume the smart money is on this information never seeing the light of day, but that is not true. Evo will eventually let out the information, but it will not point at them.

Instead it will be creatively reshaped to point the finger at one of their rivals. Of course, if Evo is changing the story, they may want to eliminate anyone who had seen the data in its original form

HORIZON (OFFER: 750,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Horizon has not played a major part in Boston and has only a few interests in the town, but they know how to spin a story—and how to find a story that might need some spinning. If they can get their hands on the data, they can lay the blame at anyone's feet and possibly offer the victim their services in spinning the story that Horizon themselves created.

Horizon is the wildcard in all this. Runners who sell to them have no idea whether this will be the next Horizon news sensation, a trideo or simsense mini-series, the next major case heard by the Corporate Court, or something completely unexpected.

LONE STAR (OFFER: 500,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

There could be nothing more satisfying than getting an investigative scoop on a rival, especially taking it from the company's own shadowrunners. If Lone Star is the security corporation that brings this investigation to the Corporate or UCAS Court, it would be a slap in the face and a painful blow for Knight Errant. The security giant would lose face in its current cities and Lone Star would possibly be able to take back a few contracts they've lost in recent years. That is, if the information ever makes it to the courts. Lone Star could simply negotiate the handover of a few contracts from Knight Errant behind closed doors as well. It's a solid win-win for the security firm whichever route they take.

MITSUHAMA (OFFER: 1,000,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

MCT has a place in Boston, but fortunately they did not play a part in the events of the quarantine. They've got operations on the inside of the QZ and they've been playing a part in the ongoing affairs through their former creations, the cytechs. Pulled in early, they have been digging and have a solid idea of who is behind the fall of Boston, and with the proof the runners have they would have everything they need to cut three major rivals down to size.

MCT will bring this information to the Corporate Court and make sure it is released to the public. Aztechnology may be able to spin their way out of trouble, but they will still be reeling from the efforts. NeoNET will be crushed, especially since Boston was their hometown, and the other sharks will likely smell the blood in the water. The megacorporate phoenix may be headed for a final burnout. Evo will face only slightly less persecution, as the public wonders if they have gone too far in their transhumanist agenda to have offered up innocents at the altar of AI embodiment.

It may not be immediate, but MCT will definitely end up with some pieces of these other megacorporations if they are ripped apart by these events.

MONOBE INTERNATIONAL (OFFER: 2,500,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM, 1 PERCENT OF VOTING STOCK FOR EACH TEAM MEMBER)

Monobe has long been looking for the leverage they need to make that last step up to AAA, and this could be exactly what they need. The Japanacorp would happily offer any of the potential defendants the information for that precious third A, even if it means taking down a rival and gaining an enemy. They would also be happy to offer it to the Corporate Court with the agreement that any lost status is given to them. The three other Japanacorps on the Court would gladly back a fourth Japanacorp on the Court. And with three corporations being accused they would lose any voice in the matter, so really all Monobe needs to do is convince one non-Japanese court. Saeder-Krupp would jump at the chance to shatter NeoNET, and Horizon would probably have little qualms with seeing Aztechnology hurt, but Wuxing is a tough nut to crack, as most of their recent rivalries have happened on the AA level.

Monobe wants this prize so badly they are willing to pay well and offer the runners a piece of their future growth.

NEONET (OFFER: 5,000,000 NUYEN FOR EACH RUNNER)

As the megacorporation with the most to lose, they are also the ones willing to offer the most. They place a massive stack of nuyen, that elusive big score, in front of the runners. All they have to do is hand over the proof of NeoNET's most life-shattering debacle and forget they ever saw it. Boston's quarantine will go down as one of the greatest mysteries in the history of the modern world, and the runners will be rich enough to leave the shadows forever.

How much is a soul worth these days?

RENRAKU (OFFER: 1,000,000 NUYEN FOR EACH RUNNER)

For the last decade and a half Renraku has bore the scar of the SCIRE disaster. Their recent efforts to rebuild their image are working, but they have no desire for anyone to be reminded of Deus and the disaster at their arcology in Seattle. This is why they are offering such a payoff to the runners.

If Renraku gets the data it will go only to the Corporate Court and be used solely for the purposes of reparations and punishments for the megacorporations involved. The details will never be released to the public in order to prevent the word Deus from spreading. The more Deus stays out of public consciousness, the better.

SAEDER-KRUPP (OFFER: 2,000,000 NUYEN FOR EACH RUNNER)

The only thing holding Saeder-Krupp back from grabbing this information and shattering their biggest rival, NeoNET, is the fact that shattering and implicating NeoNET will effect Celedyr. If S-K gets the data, they will make a series of deals that will shatter NeoNET behind closed doors without pinning this event on a dragon. Evo and Aztechnology will take their fair share of a beating too, but it will be NeoNET that takes the brunt of S-K's crushing blows.

SHIAWASE (OFFER: 1,000,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Shiawase has enough interests in and around Boston that they have taken quite the hit from the events. They have no personal stake and hold no personal grudges due to the events, but they simply seek to repair their bottom line and pad it a little while the repairs are occurring.

They won't throw this information out to the public, as they have no desire for the public or even the citizens of other megacorporations to feel the need to begin questioning the acts of all the megacorporations. Instead they will humbly bring it to the attention of the Corporate Court and request that reparations be paid by the violating corporations to their fellow megacorporations, as well as to the City of Boston and the UCAS government.

WUXING, INC. (OFFER: 1,500,000 NUYEN FOR EACH RUNNER)

Why is Wuxing willing to pay so much? Because they are angry. No one would ever be able to tell, though, as the corporate calm that is the way of Wuxing would never allow that sort of display of uncontrolled emotion, but the megacorporation is on the verge of losing a massive amount of money and they want a way to earn that money back, or to make someone else pay it for them. Wuxing is the owner of Fidelity Mutual Insurance (FMI), the largest insurance firm in Boston. When the QZ comes down, the claims will flood in, and FMI will be bankrupted and beyond.

Wuxing will make sure this information gets into the hands of the Corporate Court and will make sure to keep a second copy they can hand over to the UCAS courts if they need to, though they shouldn't. The CC will slap reparations on those at fault, and Wuxing will have someone else to pay off their insurance claims, all the while improving their reputation in Boston.

ZETA-IMPCHEM (OFFER: 4,000,000 NUYEN FOR THE TEAM)

Strange to see this company on this list, but they are here for a very good reason, a better reason than many of the others in fact. That reason is Katrina Thyssen, or what used to be Katrina Thyssen. Thyssen is a head case. She underwent léonization procedures through Nightingale Clinics and their files showed some strange side effects that could have been related to the process. A few weeks later it was all cleared up and Thyssen was happy with the work. It wasn't Nightingale or the léonization that caused the infection (though that sped it along), it was her own nanohive and her contact with infected nanites from an unverified source.

If the data ends up in her hands, the possibilities are endless. She is not likely to expose her kind to the scrutiny of the Corporate Court (or any other court for that matter), but she will have the ammunition to bring down NeoNET, a desire deeply seeded into the psyche of her AI. She just needs to figure out how to do it without getting herself killed, probably by finding an ally with similar desires.

Once the runners have made their decision, it is a simple matter of setting up a meet spot to make the exchange and possibly fulfill any other promises the winning corporation has made. This meeting doesn't have to be smooth; there are plenty of other interested parties that might try to horn in on the deal. As long as the runners were not foolish enough to ask to meet alone, whoever they are selling to will gladly help them survive the encounter just in case the runners lined up a double-cross or some kind of code on the data they may need later.

CHARACTERS

- Fenrir Wolves (Character Trove, p. 216)
- Devil's Coven wiz ganger (Character Trove, p. 214)
- Head Case YNT Special Security (Character Trove, p. 218)
- Head Case Evo Marine (Character Trove, p. 216)
- Head Case YNT Security (Character Trove, p. 218)
- Stoneham Security Force (Character Trove, p. 225)
- NeoNET Towers Minuteman Security (Character Trove, p. 223)

LOCATIONS

NEONET TOWERS (FORMERLY NOVATECH TOWERS, FORMERLY FUCHI TOWERS)

The NeoNET Towers are located in the southeast corner of the Hub between Purchase Street, Congress Street, and Federal Street. They are a cluster of six towers, five around the points of a star and a central tower, all connected with walkways. The walkways are every ten floors on the outer towers and every two on the central tower, making a staggered spiral almost all the way to the top of each tower, except for the central tower, which is twenty to thirty floors taller than the others. Each tower has one floor above the last walkway. Tower One has 111 floors, Two has 113 floors, Three has 115 floors, Four has 117 floors, Five has 119 floors, and Central has 140 floors. All of the towers have five floors of subbasements, and a three-floor parking garage sits below the grounds around all the towers with access from all three streets.

The entire complex is not strictly NeoNET operations. The outer towers have numerous floors and office spaces leased to other corporations, many of which are NeoNET subsidiaries and fronts. There are offices, labs, restaurants, storage facilities, and luxury hotel rooms in all the outer towers. The outer towers have a penthouse office on half of the top floor and a helipad on the other half.

Central Tower is all NeoNET and double the width of the smaller outer towers. The top floor has five penthouse office suites with five helipads. The luxury hotel suites and restaurants in this tower are all located on floors 125 to 135. 136 to 139 are ultra-high security and have no listed occupancy. Below 125 are offices, labs, restaurants, two shopping centers, a NeoNET museum, and ten floors of mid-range condominiums.

Minuteman Security provides all the security on site with the exception of Central Tower Penthouse Office Suites 5 and 6, which are secured by Celedyr's Knights of Rage. Every tower has its own security offices, at least three in each (Tower Five has four, Central has six), that respond to security calls and monitor a section of floors in their building. Each office can contact other offices for backup or to head off intruders. The security staff are all adept at using the walkways and crossing between buildings efficiently.

FORT INDEPENDENCE FREE ZONE

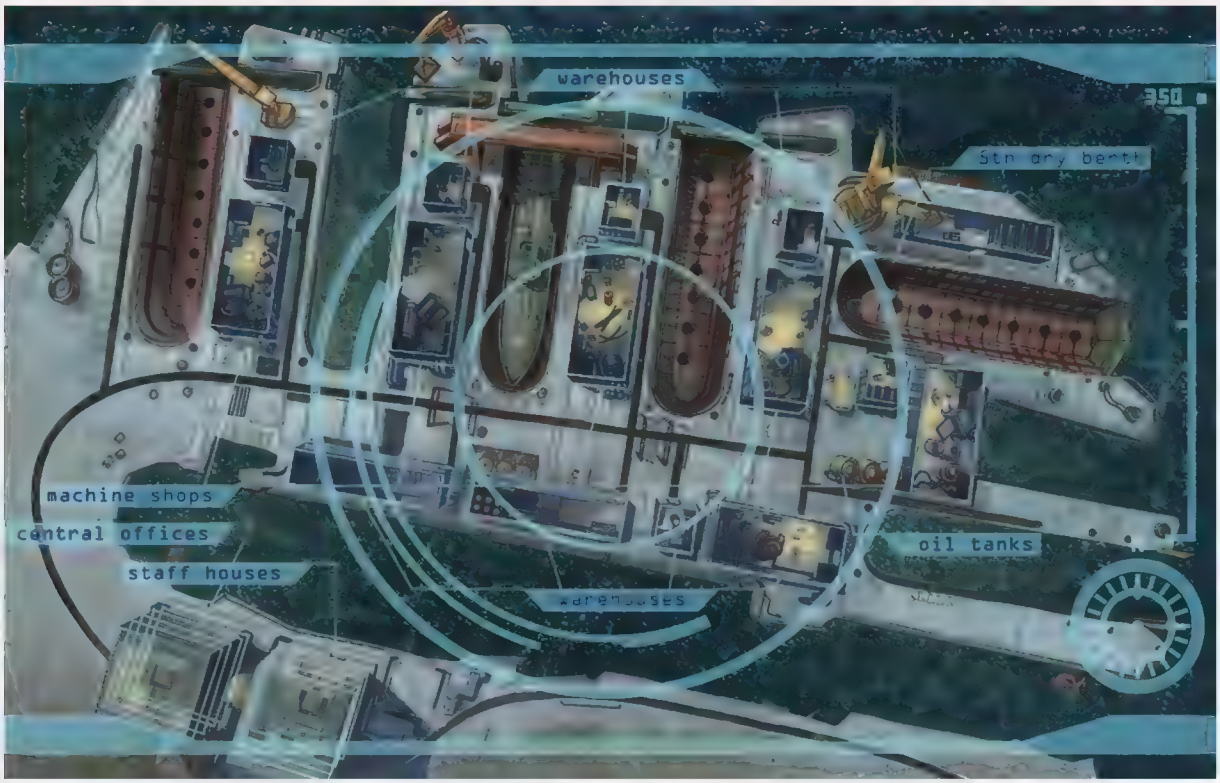
Located along the northern edge of the peninsula that ends in the fort this place is named for, this is a great place to find a good time inside the QZ, but not until at least week three of the quarantine.

The area started with ships coming into the small harbor to wait out the quarantine. Many of the ships were turned back at the QZ border when they tried to leave, and instead of risking a return to the regular shipping docks they headed here to hopefully avoid an inspection that might locate illegal cargo. The captains of all these vessels came together early on after the initial craziness and decided to use the docks to form a market to sell some of their goods to the locals. Everything was more expensive since it was early in the quarantine and supply drops weren't regular yet. The area attracted thugs, who got hired by the captains, then gangers who got chased off but still staged operations out of the warehouse areas, eventually taking control of the southern half of the peninsula.

Currently, Fort Independence is where both groups, and lots of others, gather to have fun, often at other people's expense. The old Fort Independence has been converted into a gladiatorial arena. They hold a variety of fights here and have gambling on winners, losers, lengths, killing blows, knockouts, and anything else a bookie will let someone lay money on that they can calculate odds for. The Free Zone residents simply come through the docks, while the folks from outside have to come across the Head Island Causeway. Only a few vehicles are allowed, and most people have to walk. That means quite a few drunks have ended up in the water, along with a few mugging victims. No one provides security on the Causeway but the captains have guards at the end to keep trouble from getting in.

The area is set up with a wall of cargo containers around the entire dock area and blocking off all the streets out to Summer Street, watched over by guards paid for by the captains. There are two entrances, each guarded by a pair of guards. One sits on the south wall, which is actually the side door of a cargo container near the docks and one on the west wall, just north of the Refinery, a functional oil refinery controlled by the tanker captains. The walls run right up to the water at the ends. Inside the wall are the Refinery, the fuel storage tanks, and the dock facilities where there are more cargo containers that have been turned into shops, homes, hotels, bars, brothels, and offices. They are stacked and turned in confusing patterns that take awhile to get used to and change regularly as new containers that have been emptied are added. Along with the cargo containers is the series of warehouses that have become a property battleground.

The waters off the docks are filled with ships and boats of all shapes and sizes. Cargo ships, tankers, ferries, and private vessels are all lashed together and have ropes, ladders, and planks connecting them. Many of the ships have extra security, especially if they have rare or expensive items. All the tankers have some extra security to prevent theft or some nutbag from blowing the whole place to kingdom come. A few smaller vessels have been crushed between larger ones as the tides changes and their bounty litters the bottom of the docks, but it's hard to reach since a number of the ships here aren't designed for these docks, and they bottom



out with low tide. Quite a few smaller boats have been trapped inside the dock alcoves, but inspired entrepreneurs have been finding ways to get them out and sell them to people near more open waters.

The south side of this area was homes, condoplexes, and urban sprawl, but it is now controlled by the gangs repelled by the captains who decided to not risk traveling back through the worsening QZ to the west. The major gangs in the area are the Wicked, a group of the Ancients, the Troll-Rocks, and the Reavers. A lot of the Troll-Rocks are getting a little work on the side doing heavy lifting for the captains, but they're only allowed inside the Free Zone in small numbers.

ENOCH FULLER HOUSE

This is one of the famous octagon houses and has been around since 1850. The building is no longer anyone's house. Instead it is a small museum with sections on Enoch Fuller, Salem architectural history including information on other Fuller buildings, octagon houses, and local legends. The different museum sections are spread throughout the house's two floors, with Enoch Fuller's history and some "Life in the 1800s" set ups in a few of the rooms to show what life was like back then.

The front and back doors both have old-fashioned mechanical key locks (Rating 3) and a silent alarm that is triggered by the door being opened and the alarm not being deactivated within sixty seconds. The alarm code panel is on the wall just inside the front door, hidden behind a picture of the house in the 1850s. The Stoneham Security Force is monitoring the local alarms and will come to check on the place if the runners don't deactivate the alarm.

YNT BOSTON DRYDOCK FACILITY

Yamatetsu Naval Technologies had a large drydock facility on the north end of Charlestown where they refit ships and performed design and structural integrity testing on new materials. The drydock has six enclosed berths that can house ships up to 230 meters long. Each berth has its own machine shop and small warehouse. There are three other large warehouses for additional parts in the facility, along with a pair of four-story buildings that have housing on the lower three floors and offices on the top floor. The housing is intended to be used by crews that need to stay with the ship for its drydock stay to do internal work, oversee the project, and provide security. Evo Marines who are assigned to YNT vessels that come to this drydock stay in the housing facilities. There is also a platoon of Evo Marines assigned here as security (though they are often borrowed by the local Evo offices) to augment the normal security staff. The Marines occasionally work with other Evo personnel in the metroplex, but when there is sensitive information or a ship with experimental technology on board, the Marines are all at the drydock facility.

GAME INFORMATION

COGNITIVE FRAGMENTATION DISORDER VIRUS

The cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD) virus contained in *Lockdown* is different from the strain seen in the rest of the world. The strain of the virus introduced here is a jacked-up super version modified to mess with the mind of a dragon. Where the CFD virus normally acts slowly and meticulously in taking over the mind of its victims, the new strain is fast, violent, and shatters the mind. There is a mix of head cases inside the QZ; some with the main strain of the virus, others with the new. Those with the primary version try their best to hide what they are to avoid confusion with the newer head cases. These more mainstream head cases (which is an odd term, but will serve our purposes), along with some of the newer ones, see the new strains (notably ragers and shamblers) as an army. Many believe them to be very dangerous and want nothing to do with them, and they also don't want to be lumped together with them. Others, though, have found ways to guide and control their less-evolved kin. This is far easier for some of the more sapient new head cases than it is for mainstream head cases, but the more common ones are still capable of giving it a shot if they want. The details on the classic flavor of head cases, can be found in **The Standard CFD Virus** section.

THE STANDARD CFD VIRUS

The CFD virus is not really a biological virus and does not require a living host to survive. The virus can and will infect machines, especially those with advanced processors (meaning high Data Processing or Pilot ratings). In doing so, though, the virus fails to perform its primary function, which is making duplicates of the AIs that created it in biological vessels.

The AIs that are trying to be written onto these biological minds come from many places. Some were deliberately built to be electronic sentiences, others were amalgamated programs that accumulated code to the point that they became self-aware, and still others were originally biological entities whose consciences were scanned and digitized or erupted in the Matrix during the Crash. Gamemasters should feel free to make up any AI they want for the purposes of infection. Some AIs have spent time as biological beings, but many others have not. Either way, for several years now they have been held in containment mainframes in Evo's Dickens Program, NeoNET's Project Imago, and any other project a gamemaster wishes to create in their game. Evo and NeoNET's programs will be the primary focus of the canon universe, but any megacorporation could have some similar, if smaller, program.

So that gamemasters are aware, forces within Evo and NeoNET are at the root of the problem, but as a whole, the bulk of the either corporation does not know what's been going on. Members of Evo's Dickens Program and the management that oversees it are becoming more and more aware of what is happening but are not about to share that information with anyone else. The same goes for Project Imago staff and its overseers, including Cerberus and Celedyr. The rest of NeoNET is as blind as Ares or Horizon. The long-term effects of the virus are constantly in flux within the minds behind this madness, but the virus will play a part in the ongoing *Shadowrun* universe for a while.

Gamemasters are encouraged to continue to play up the mystery behind the virus, along with the damaging and insidious effects it has on those who are infected as well as those around them. But be careful with your PCs. Infection is a major, character-changing event, and there are no known cures for this virus. It can be fun to roleplay someone who is fighting for their mind with the hope to someday find a cure, but that cure is not within the universe yet. Dealing with the ramifications of cognitive fragmentation disorder over the long term may not be enjoyable for some players, so the gamemaster should take care in who gets it.

In terms of personality and coping skills within their new form, e-ghosts tend to have an easier time with their new forms than do pure AI, as the e-ghost at least has some distant understanding of what it is, or was, to be human. AIs will have all sorts of problems, not only

during the transitional period while they fight for control of the mind, but once control is gained and they have a meatsack they don't know how to take care of or maintain. Many AIs are going to end up in sick or damaged bodies as they misinterpret the feelings they get or how to treat them in a physical body. The concepts of eating and sleeping are quite foreign to them, and machines do not have hormones. Though some head cases may learn to control their bodies better than others, none of them will handle unexpected hormonal effects well. Even if they are aware of the release and technical aspects of the hormone, they don't understand the sensations they create. They are adult, sometimes genius intelligences who are as unprepared to deal with hormones and connected emotions as the average teenager. This can make for significant dangers, but also a lot of fun.

In the game universe the prevalence of nanotech and genetech is going to drop drastically due to the risk of CFD infection. Corps will pull away from the products when they can't seem to find a cure. This means corporate citizens will get less of the tech, but in order to clear out present stock and save the bottom line it will be sold to the street. On the streets it can still be put in where few people know of its true potential for damage.

INFECTION

CFD virus stats include two aspects, Nanite Volume (NV) and Matrix Entity Concentration (MEC). The NV is based on the number of nanites in the subject, while MEC is a measure of the concentration and cohesion of the Matrix Entity programmed into the nanites (see the **Nanite Volume** table for how to determine NV). The MEC is determined by the gamemaster and varies based on the concentration of a dominant Matrix Entity in the nanites. A single nanite population may be made up of a single Matrix Entity or many Matrix Entities that are all battling for control of the mind they infect. A single powerful ME will overwrite a subject faster, meaning a faster change, but the mass of personalities often results in an amalgam at the end and a crazy roller coaster ride along the way.

The process isn't fast, but it is eerily certain. As it occurs, characters will need to make weekly Resistance Tests and more frequent Control Tests as long as they are infected.

In biological systems, the nanites use the body's own low integrity to rewrite the human mind and replace the original personality. This process varies between head cases and is determined by the Charisma and Essence of the subject and the MEC rating of the CFD virus trying to overwrite them. For computer or electronic systems, the infection occurs at whatever speed the gamemaster determines based on his own plot desires.

Resistance consists of weekly Opposed Charisma + Essence v. Nanite Volume + Matrix Entity Concentration Test. Net hits received by the character create a Control Dice Pool that they can use throughout the week on Control Tests. The dice pool is finite and not a bonus to every roll; each time they use a portion of that pool, that portion goes away. That means players will want to save it for those times when they really don't want to black out. Success by the virus reduces the character's Willpower by 1. When Willpower reaches 0 the AI has completely taken over. Willpower lost this way is permanent but can be raised back up with Karma, per standard Character Advancement rules. The gamemaster is free to return an infected NPC's Willpower to whatever they would like.

Control Tests consist of a Simple Composure (4) Test. Missing the threshold results in a loss of control for (4 – hits)d6 hours.

The Control Test occurs daily at minimum. Additional tests also occur when the subject suffers an injury of at least 4 boxes in a single attack; suffers a total of 6 boxes of damage total (Physical or Stun); is forced into unconsciousness; or allows his or her body to become worn down (meaning any situation where they must resist Fatigue). When the subject is injured, the CFD personality attempts to gain control in order to prevent further damage to its host. If the AI or AI fragment successfully gains control, injured characters flee. When the subject is knocked out, the AI or AI fragment automatically gains control (see the **Adrenal Control** advantage for rules). Those rendered unconscious will suddenly wake as the AI fragment and flee.

Failing a daily test could either mean a loss of time while the character thought they were sleeping, leading to more potential Fatigue rolls due to the missed sleep, or it could be a lead in to trouble when the character comes back into control in some unpleasant environment like a firefight or in the back of a Knight Errant patrol car.

NANITE TABLE

NANOWARE/ GENEWARE	NANITE VOLUME (CUMULATIVE)
Nanohive	+ rating
Nanite System	+ 1/2 rating
Genetech	1 per 2 genetic modifications

While genetech is not explicitly part of the virus, its presence makes it easier for the virus to overwrite its host thanks to the already overwritten DNA, so it factors into the Nanite Volume rating.

Unlike in most nanotech cases, where the nanites wear out and the Rating drops over time, nanites that are CFD infected have developed a way to reproduce. As long as the head case ingests food, the nanites are able to create soft nanites at a rate of +1 NV every week. If the head case can eat some inorganic materials, the nanites can create hard nanites at the same rate. That means a feeding head case increases their nanite count at a rate higher than the degradation of old nanites (-1/month), which are often recycled if they have not been flushed from the body by injury or waste evacuation.

We never said this was pleasant.

CURES

This is easy. There are none. For now. There are ways to slow and weaken the virus enough to keep it from developing quickly but no known way to completely purge the virus and its effects from the victim's system exist in the universe as of yet. Here are a few possible methods and what we suggest as effects. Truly creative players (which we know there are many of in *Shadowrun*) will try other things as well. Gamemasters are encouraged to continue the creativity in the effects of those cures. Maybe it slows the infection or holds it at bay for a while, but CFD is relentless and not eager to be stopped.

HUNTER-KILLER NANITES

These actually make the virus worse. The CFD nanites spread the virus to other nanites and the hunter-killers join the fun in trying to overwrite the character's mind. CFD is a virus for other nanites as well. Every application of H-K nanites increases the Nanite Volume by 1.

SPELLS

Most spells are terrible at targeting nanites for two reasons. First, they are too small to be seen individually or create a connection to them directly. Second, they are highly processed, and magic and tech do not blend well. Spells cast on a head case targeting the nanites, have their Drain increased by +2 at a minimum and may not work at all. Be creative, and make it tough—this virus is not fair.

CHEMICALS

Chemical procedures are partially effective against the virus, specifically targeting soft nanites that are affected by the chemicals. Hard nanites are unaffected when working with a level of chemical that will not kill the subject.

PROCEDURES

Medical procedures designed to extract nanites from the bloodstream won't cure the condition, but they will pull some infected nanites from the target's system that can be used to infect someone else or be studied in a lab. This will also decrease the Nanite Volume of the host by half (rounded up), to a minimum of 1.

COMBINED EFFORTS

Attacking the nanites with multiple treatments all at once will probably be the best way to find a potential cure or solid method of delaying the virus and slowing its progress. Maybe a spell with an Electricity (e) effect to stun the nanites in the system, alongside a chemical treatment to destroy the organic nanites and some blood scrubbing to clear out the nanites that are temporarily disabled. It's all a matter of trying to balance player enjoyment with the inevitability of CFD.

HEAD CASE ADVANTAGES

Head cases have a number of abilities that come with being infected. These abilities are not available to the base subject, only to the head case personality when it is in control of the body.

ATTRIBUTE BOOST

Head cases can boost any of their Physical Attributes through manipulation of their biochemistry using their nanites. Using Attribute Boost requires a Simple Action. The head case makes a Simple Nanite Volume roll. For each hit, the head case can increase any Physical Attribute by 1. These points can be distributed over separate attributes as the gamemaster desires, even on the same test. These boosts last for a number of rounds equal to the number of hits on the roll. After this time the head case suffers a number of boxes of Stun damage equal to the hits on the Nanite Volume roll.

TOXIN RESISTANCE

Head cases can add their Nanite Volume attribute to any Toxin Resistance Test or Damage Resistance Test versus an illness or toxin.

ADRENAL CONTROL

Head Cases can make a Simple Willpower + Nanite Volume (2) Test every Combat Round to stay conscious even when their Physical Condition Monitor is full. They

can still take Physical damage and it follows standard rules for damage overflow. Head cases can also stay conscious when their Stun Condition Monitor is filled. The head case makes a Simple Nanite Volume roll and reduces their current Stun monitor by the number of hits on the roll. This effect lasts for a number of minutes equal to the number of hits on the Nanite Volume roll. When the time expires, the head case gets all the removed damage back, plus 1 additional box for each test they have made. This means they suffer Physical damage (and possibly death) and pass out.

If the CFD virus is still fighting for control, the indigenous personality resurfaces after the incident as the virus personality tries to recover from the trauma and massive use of energy from the nanites.

LOCKDOWN CFD

RESISTANCE ISN'T FUTILE

One of the largest differences between the new strain of the CFD Virus comes in resistance and infection. One of the major avenues of research that Cerberus and Celedyr focused on was making the virus short term. They had no desire to write Cerberus back into Eliohann and subsequently into everyone who comes into contact with the dragon. That's the reason the virus has not completely overrun the QZ at this point, but it is still poses a considerable threat.

Individuals exposed to the initial nanites with the new stream of CFD in the first seventy-two hours have virally active nanites. These nanites follow the same rules as mainstream CFD virus nanites with the exception of the test frequency and side effects. Once infected, a character must resist with hourly tests against the nanites for forty-eight hours. If the nanites have not dropped the character's Willpower to 0 by the end of the infection stage, the nanites begin to rapidly die off. If they have taken over the character's mind, they stop acting to overwrite the mind and instead act to rebuild it. Willpower that has been lost stays at its reduced value, but it can be built back up with Karma.

The new strain is also different from head cases in the concentration of their nanites in the brain. This strain of nanites concentrates in and around the brain and acts as a network within the mind as part of the process. This allows special benefits in the Matrix but also opens them up to certain attacks (see **Hacking the Minds of Madness**, p. 202).

After the initial release and infection, the newly infected head cases lose all the virally active nanites as they concentrate around the brain to maintain the network that supports the overwritten brain, and they maintain virulence only in the brain. This means that the only two ways to catch the Cerberus strain of the virus is from nanites that have not yet infected a host and then run their course, or from brain matter spatter.

Nanites on surfaces, including the clothes of head cases who didn't change after the rain or exposure, are still virally active. Any nanites that have not run their course, including those still inside the storage vats at MIT&T, can cause infection and follow the same course as described above.

The bulk of the new strain head cases come in three varieties. The first are those who somehow came cleanly through the infection with a solid personality in place. The personalities can be either pure Cerberus or Deus or any point on the spectrum in between, but whatever the personality, the host mind was strong enough to adapt to and accept the massively alien intellect of the dragon or AI in such a short period. They are rare, devious, and cunning. The second variety includes those who had a nanohive, extensive nanoaugmentation, or extreme initial exposure. The nanites in the nanohive or nanoaugmentations are infected by the virus and have a quantity to do the overwrite cleanly and neatly enough to install a personality but they tend to be wilder, more chaotic, and aggressive, but not feral. The third variety are those whose minds come through damaged. These are the feral shamblers and ragers, and the bulk of the infected in Boston.

A CURE FOR WHAT AILS YOU

Thus far there is only one guaranteed way of preventing CFD infection and that is to be one of the Infected, with a capital I. HMHVV is incompatible with the work of the virus and results in either death or resistance. The work done on limiting the new faster strain of the virus has led to some small breakthroughs in virus resistance and even a project for overcoming both viruses.

NeoNET, Celedyr in particular, is very aware of what is happening within Evo and the number of head cases in their ranks. He wants a cure to prevent similar infiltration and infestation of his company and, honestly, the rest of the world, so he has also created a nanite for helping wipe out the CFD virus in its initial stages of infection. The cure is composed of specially designed hunter-killer nanites called Overwriters that are programmed through a direct connection in a special solution to hunt other nanites. They have no wireless connectivity and therefore cannot be infected by the virus. The window for them to do their work is short, as the victim has to be in the early stages, but Overwriters destroy CFD virus nanites, and they can reduce the Nanite Volume to 0 and stop further infection.

There is another sad truth hidden in the Boston epidemic. Shamblers and ragers are not, in fact, completely mindless, and they suppress the personalities of their victims. The original personality is present and fully aware of what is going on. These real personalities can come out when the individual is knocked unconscious or goes to sleep. It is a rare occurrence, as the personalities

are usually terrified and scarred by what has happened to them and what they have watched from behind the eyes of the head case.

There is another cure option, derived from research done by Evo and performed on Evo head cases. The Evo head cases on Mars at Gagarin base have nearly perfected the movement of consciousness from electronic to biological formats. This work, combined with NeoNET's Hunter-Killer nanites and the programming goo for the Overwriter nanites, will allow head cases to have specific personalities written onto their minds, including the suppressed mind inside the shamblers and ragers. Those inner personalities will likely come through damaged by their time buried under a twisted personality, but at least they will have control of their body back. In the case of other head cases—that is, the ones besides shamblers and ragers—the inner personality may not have survived in a distinct or recoverable form, meaning it can never be recovered. Much of this depends on how the original mind battled the initial infection and how many pieces of it managed to survive the struggle with the new personality.

There is one other hope for a cure. Here and there, some individuals report that after long months of mental struggle (and a range of therapies), they have thrown off the invasive personality through sheer force of will, with an assist by the remarkable healing and re-wiring strategies of the brain. The reliability of these anecdotes and the exact circumstances that led to this supposed cure will be carefully scrutinized in the future.

HACKING THE MINDS OF MADNESS

The new head cases are an interesting lot from a Matrix perspective. Every one is active in the Matrix at all times through their nanites. Due to the limited power of the nanites they can't project far in a heavy noise area, but the larger their concentration the harder they can push through noise. In some circumstances this can mean working in groups to break through the noise.

These creations use similar rules to technomancers; see the **Head Case Matrix Attribute** chart (p. XX) for details. They are far more simple-minded and feral than most technomancers, so their attacks tend to be blunt and direct. The more advanced new head cases—manipulators, haters, and the hidden—are more sophisticated in their techniques and are often skilled hackers. Some of these head cases also have the ability to reconfigure their mental deck and re-assign the attributes as if they were a standard cyberdeck.

What this means for hackers is that these new head cases are susceptible to Matrix damage, and their minds can be hacked to a degree. Hacking a head case's mind allows access to a few things. First, surface thoughts can be read. These usually are nothing more than "kill" or "eat," but sometimes poking around can reveal commands from others. Next, hackers can attempt to obtain access to sensory data. Usually this means visual and auditory data, but all the senses are allowed. If the hacker is running hot-sim, he also gets unpleasant sensations like hunger and pain if they interface with the tactile sense. That means that if the head case they have hacked into is experiencing any negative modifiers due to wounds or fatigue modifiers from any source, the hacker experiences those same modifiers for as long as they maintain the sensory link. Taste is usually horrible as well, since none of these creatures has brushed their teeth since they were infected, and they've been eating mostly raw meat. The third and most difficult level of control is motor control. Hackers can puppet them with full access. This can mean walking, talking, attacking, even holding their breath or self-mutilation (though those are resisted with a test pitting the hacker's Data Processing against the target's Willpower). If the hacker provides the control feed to a rigger with a VCR, the rigger can jump in to the head case.

Both riggers and hackers suffer dumpshock if the head case they are controlling is killed while they are accessing any of its data feeds or exerting any form of control over it.

HEAD CASE MATRIX ATTRIBUTES

ATTRIBUTE	MODIFIER
Attack	Willpower + 1/2 NV
Sleaze	Logic + 1/2/ NV
Data Processing	Intuition + 1/2 NV
Firewall	Charisma + 1/2 NV

EVOLUTION

Since their creation, head cases are always evolving. These new abilities can be available to original head cases as well as the new amped up ones from this tome of madness. The following abilities are available to all head cases at the gamemaster's discretion.

FASTER HEALING

The nanites in a head case are very keen on keeping their hosts alive long enough to get full control of the body, and once they have it they want to keep that body up and running. Therefore they put in some extra effort in repairing their hosts when they're injured. Head cases heal much faster than naturally possible thanks to billions of little machines hanging out and performing all the necessary repairs.

Basic Healing Tests are performed every five minutes for Stun Damage and every two hours for Physical Damage, and the head case adds their Nanite Volume rating to the test. This isn't a perfect process; the head case needs raw materials to perform the repairs. There's only one way for the head case to get these raw materials and it is simply ghoulish—literally, to the extent that it may lead some head cases to be mistaken for ghouls. The head case needs to ingest 1 kilogram of animal flesh in any form for every Condition Monitor box it wants to heal. For a general perspective, an adult liver weighs about 1.5 kg, while a leg is about twenty percent of a metahuman's

overall body mass (meaning a 100 kilogram ork has a 20 kilogram leg). The ratios don't have to be perfect, but the efforts to heal should be creepy and rather disgusting.

RAPID HEALING

This healing option looks a lot like Regeneration, and again can cause some mistaken identity with the Infected. The head case uses a little self-cannibalism to heal in seconds. They don't actually eat themselves but instead use their own body tissue to repair other areas. This process costs the head case Body or Strength Attribute points that can only be replenished by consuming ten kilograms of protein-laden food (meat, beans, cheese, etc.) and making Healing Tests to repair Body and/or Strength points instead of Condition Monitor boxes. Note that only Body and Strength lost through Rapid Healing may be healed this way.

After an injury, a head case may reduce their Body or Strength by one point and can then repair up to (Attribute Rating x 10) boxes of Physical Damage before needing to spend another point from one of their Attributes. The Attribute Rating for the multiplier is the original attribute (Body 6 drops to 5 but allows 60 boxes of healing). The boxes remain as a pool for repairing any future damage until they are all used up. The healing occurs at a maximum rate of (Nanite Volume) boxes of Physical Damage per Initiative Pass for 4 Initiative Passes. This even occurs on Initiative Passes where the head case does not have any Initiative Score left.

Faster Healing and Rapid Healing are not mutually exclusive, and the head case can eat animal matter to heal while retaining boxes in their pool. This process can be used for atmosphere as well as rules. Runners may encounter half-eaten carcasses in the wild while trying to recover a lost corp kid from the Hub, or see mutilated bodies left behind as they try to protect their small enclave from a mysterious killer who has survived several fights and keeps coming back (rather quickly) for more, while the runners are slowly wearing down.

DAMAGE RESISTANCE

Head cases, especially the ones in Boston, are not only extremely resilient, but also quite resistant to Physical injury. Any Physical damage inflicted on a head case is immediately reduced by 1/2 their Nanite Volume (rounded down) due to the nanites immediately limiting damaging secondary (and some primary) effects. Stun damage is not affected by this trait. The Physical resistance can be overcome by Electricty attacks. Once all Stun Condition Monitor boxes are full, Electricity overflow damage becomes Physical and is not reduced.

NO WOUND TOO GREAT

Thanks to the nanites in their bodies and a natural neurological and biological blueprint that becomes part of the nanite programming, head cases are extremely difficult to kill for good. Almost any injury can be healed, even some serious brain injuries, so head cases can keep coming back, sometimes with a different face as the nanites restructure the face of their host. The exception to this, and one of the few ways to truly kill a head case, is Electricity damage. This damage causes the nanites to short out while they try to fix their host (which means the Damage Resistance ability does not function while these repairs are in process). The problem is this also tends to kill the host as well. So if you don't want to lose the host, proceed cautiously.

INSIDE THE MIND

The primary personality of a head case is never really gone. It simply becomes an unwilling and tortured passenger on the ride that is CFD infection. Original personalities may have to bear helpless witness as the new personality engages their body in unspeakable acts. The new personality may be researching how bodies function, may deliberately be torturing the primary personality, or may not have any real clue as to why it is doing what it's doing. Whatever the reason, the actions have an effect on the buried personality, often leaving it wrecked and broken. It cannot turn away from what it is seeing, and it cannot regain control. Madness is the mind's only escape.

THE FORCES OF DARKNESS

So we all know where it started; the next question is what the fallout will be. Some of this will be up to *Shadowrun* players. Results from adventures in this book and from the *Shadowrun Chronicles: Boston Lockdown* video game will be gathered and will influence the metaplot going forward. Of course, if players are going to affect things going forward, they need to understand what the major players are doing inside the QZ. So here's the rundown.

AZTECHNOLOGY

They are not the cause of the initial virus, but their participation in the experiment that set the nanites loose on Boston could be enough to damn them. In order to cover their tracks, they are looking to get every bit of information connected to Aztechnology deleted and then modified to point the finger at their two partners, Evo and NeoNET. They are masters of public spin and all they need to do is minimize their own exposure in order to get the blame to slide right off.

The problem for them is, most runners hate them and will do everything in their power to burn them at every turn. Aztechnology is well aware of this hatred and usually prevents runners from burning them by making sure the runners don't have anything to burn them with. Or they just make use of the classic "dead men tell no tales" principle.

Aztechnology runs will be dangerous and probably followed by a doublecross, or they'll include a doublecross along the way as another team or an Aztechnology hacker steals whatever data the runners got for them.

EVO

As one of the progenitors of the original CFD virus, Evo is in a dangerous position following the incident in Boston. To defend themselves they will be looking to get all the blame pinned on NeoNET. At the same time, they'll be gathering as much information on the CFD virus and the process by which they installed an AI mind into the body of a dragon as they can in order to use the process and market it in the future to AIs who want bodies or people who want to live longer by being reloaded into a younger body. Their research will also look into why this variation of the virus is different than the last one, and why it results in so many fast-changing crazies and not as many good uploads.

Evo will be hiring runners to also defend their interests from the head cases as well as trying to destroy any trace of Evo's involvement with the catastrophe, including burning bodies and other companies' nanite stores where some Evo nanites might be present.

NEONET

They started it. And thus, they feel they should end it. NeoNET is looking to pin all the blame on Evo and use that corp's transhumanist agenda as proof of how they designed a nanite virus that can overwrite human minds with AI intelligences. They also have no problem pointing the finger at Aztechnology, and are quite willing to manufacture evidence showing how they lost control of Eliohann's lab to a joint effort of Aztechnology and Evo who wanted to see how a dragon reacted to the virus to see if they had a potential anti-dragon weapon. It's a stretch, but it sure beats taking the fall for this disaster.

At the same time NeoNET is also trying to save the city of Boston and look for a way to cure or stop the spread of the virus. They have the most to lose if the city of Boston suffers, and inside the quarantine they are trying hard to eliminate the head cases and stop the virus, through attacks against the head cases and research on a cure.

MEDICAL MIRACLES

PINPOINT

- **Vector:** Injection/Inhalation/Ingestion
- **Speed:** Immediate/1 Combat Turn/5 minutes
- **Duration:** (12 - Body) hours, minimum of 2 hours
- **Addiction Type:** Psychological
- **Effect:** +2 Intuition, +1 Mental limit, -10 penalty on Perception Tests not made with Observe in Detail action

This drug tightens and limits neural pathways related to perception, bringing out the fine details in sensory material as well as accelerating the transmission process by limiting input. The drug grants a +2 Intuition bonus and +1 increase to the Mental limit. All Perception Tests must be made using the Observe in Detail action or else suffer a -10 dice pool penalty. Pinpoint users gain a focus on singular things and become oblivious to most other things going on around them.

After the drug wears off, the user suffers a -3 penalty to their Intuition Rating and -2 decrease to their Mental limit for a number of hours equal to the duration of the drug's positive effect.

NUMB

- **Vector:** Injection
- **Speed:** Immediate
- **Duration:** 10 x 1d6 minutes
- **Addiction Type:** Physiological
- **Effect:** High Pain Tolerance (14), -2 Perception (tactile), -1 Agility, See text

This drug functions by delivering a derivative of Novocain throughout the entire body. The user gains the High Pain Tolerance (14) quality for the duration of the drug, along with the ability to stay alert at times when unconsciousness normally would set in. If the user suffers enough boxes of damage to put them unconscious, they don't go down until the drug wears off or both Condition Monitors and Overflow are full.

Side effects include a decrease in overall tactile perception resulting in a -2 Perception Test modifier for tactile tests and a -1 penalty to all Agility-based tests.

Improper use of the drug causes the user to develop the Low Pain Tolerance quality. If the user ever completely fills either Condition Monitor while on the drug, they gain the quality.

BUFFOUT

- **Vector:** Injection,/Inhalation/Ingestion
- **Speed:** Immediate/1 Combat Turn/10 minutes
- **Duration:** 10 x 1d6 minutes
- **Addiction Type:** Physiological
- **Effect:** +6 Strength for Lift/Carry and Grappling, -4 Strength for standard melee damage

This drug super-oxygenates muscle tissue and provides bonding and locking compounds for adrenaline processing to increase the contraction power and endurance of the muscle tissue. This actions results in a +6 Strength bonus for determining Lifting and Carrying capacity as well as Strength in Grappling checks to maintain a hold or doing damage. Due to a restrictive property in the bonding compounds, the user suffers a -4 penalty to their Strength when determining standard melee damage as the muscles are slower to respond.

While under the effects of the drug, the user can seriously injure themselves by overexerting their body. Any

use of the bonus Strength, whether through a Strength test or a Grappling attack, inflicts 3S damage resisted with natural Body only. Each time they use the bonus Strength, perform the Resistance Test and track the damage inflicted so that it can be applied after the drug wears off. The user also becomes irrational and paranoid while under the influence of buffout due to harmful interactions within the brain chemistry, giving them a -2 penalty to any Judge Intentions Test.

After the drug wears off, the user suffers any damage they inflicted on themselves, and they also receive a -3 modifier to Agility and -2 to Logic for a period of time equal to the duration of the drug. Agility reduced to 0 in this way means a complete inability to move due to joint and tendon locking, while Logic at 0 means the user is unable to think clearly enough to do anything.

ACCELERATOR

- **Vector:** Injection, Inhalation
- **Speed:** Immediate
- **Duration:** 2D6 Combat Turns
- **Addiction Type:** Both
- **Effect:** +3D6 Initiative dice, -2 Body for Damage Resistance Tests, increased bleeding damage

This drug opens up blood vessels to increase blood flow to muscles while increasing synaptic speed connections for the user. The result is an increase in speed but a greater risk of injury due to blood flow enhancement. The user gains +3D6 Initiative dice (making for a base total of 4D6 before augmentations and enhancements).

As an instant side-effect, they bleed and bruise faster, making them suffer a -2 penalty to Body for all Damage Resistance Tests. Additionally, any wound that would cause bleeding (gunshot, knife, sword, etc.) causes 2P unresisted damage every round until First Aid or magical healing is applied.

This drug has proven uniquely compatible with base model cybernetic and bionetic enhancements. The Initiative Dice increase is compatible with Rating 1 initiative enhancement systems (making for a total 5D6 initiative dice bonus, but that's as high as the bonus goes). Users with higher-rated initiative enhancements still only get 5D6.

After the enhanced speed effect wears off, users suffer from severe and horrific hallucinations and paranoia for a period of hours equal to the number of Combat Turns the drug lasted.

CYBER SUITES

These systems are custom designed to match the user perfectly and to be perfectly integrated within their own systems and within the user. They do not, however, function alongside any other implants, including cyberware and bioware. This means three things. 1) The suites provide Essence reductions compared to buying each component individually. 2) The suites have absolutely no compatibility with any other implants. Any augmentations in place at the same time as the suite, whether installed before or after the suite, cannot function as long as the suite is in place, as the communications between the components of the suite interfere with the functions of other augmentations. No matter how seemingly insignificant those augmentations are. 3) Very little resale value. The system only returns five percent of its initial cost if cyber-scavenged.

The only way new elements can be added to cybersuites is by adding new features to elements that have the capacity to accept them, such as cyberears and cybereyes. This works because the existing overarching systems stay the same; only the internal wiring is changed.

SPINRAD SYSTEMS: JUST A LITTLE EDGE

- Cybereyes (Rating 2)
- Muscle replacement 1
- Plastic bone lacing
- Reaction enhancers 1
- Wired reflexes 1

SPINRAD SYSTEMS: PEAK PERFORMANCE

- Aluminum bone lacing
- Cyberears (Rating 2)
- Cybereyes (Rating 3)
- Muscle replacement 2
- Reaction enhancers 2
- Wired reflexes 1

SPINRAD SYSTEMS: SUPER ATHLETE

- Aluminum bone lacing
- Cyberears (Rating 2)
- Cybereyes (Rating 3)
- Muscle replacement 3
- Reaction enhancers 2
- Wired reflexes 2

DRUG EFFECT TABLE

DRUG	AVAILABILITY	COST (PER DOSE)	ADDICTION RATING	ADDICTION THRESHOLD
Accelerator	6R	200¥	6	1
Buffout	6R	100¥	5	1
Numb	6R	150¥	5	1
Pinpoint	6R	75¥	6	1

CYBER SUITES TABLE

SYSTEM	ESSENCE	AVAILABILITY	COST
Just a Little Edge	3.5	10R	125,000¥
Peak Performance	5.0	14R	195,000¥
Super Athlete	4.5	14R	325,000¥
Freak	4.5	18R	150,000¥
BTH: Better Than Human	4.5	16R	275,000¥
InHuman	5	18R	175,000¥
Mind Boost	1	10	185,000¥
Mental Gymnast	2	20	375,000¥
Front Line Mind	4.5	14	575,000¥
Infiltrator	3	14R	210,000¥
Field Operative	2.5	10R	120,000¥
Ultimate Warrior	5.0	22R	725,000¥
Kaisatsu	2	10R	120,000¥
Abunai	3.5	14R	345,000¥
Kuro	5.25	22R	725,000¥

EVO FREAK

This system does not always look the same. The user custom selects the "freakish" appearance from a wide variety of looks from lizardman to Frankenstein. The cyberlimbs are all adjusted to fit the look.

- Cyberears (Rating 1)
- Cybereyes (Rating 1)
- Cyberlimb (Lower arm, left, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower arm, right, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower leg, left, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower leg, right, Obvious)
- Cyberskull (Obvious)
- Dermal plating 2
- Wired reflexes 1

EVO: BTH (BETTER THAN HUMAN)

- Cyberarm (both, Obvious)
- Cyberears (Rating 2)
- Cybereyes (Rating 2)
- Cyberleg (both, Obvious)
- Orthoskin 2
- Reaction enhancers 3
- Synaptic booster 1

EVO: INHUMAN

This system does not always look the same. The user custom selects the "Inhuman" appearance from a wide variety of looks from lizardman to Frankenstein. The cyberlimbs are all adjusted to fit the look. This is similar to the Freak system but goes even further to reshape the user's torso as well.

- Cyberears (Rating 1)
- Cybereyes (Rating 1)
- Cyberlimb (Lower arm, left, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower arm, right, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower leg, left, Obvious)
- Cyberlimb (Lower leg, right, Obvious)
- Cyberskull (Obvious)
- Cybertorso (Obvious)
- Wired reflexes 1

TRANSYS-ERIKA: MIND BOOST

- Cerebral booster 1
- Commlink (Transys Avalon)
- Cyberears (Rating 1)
- Cybereyes (Rating 1)
- Datajack
- Mnemonic enhancer 1
- Simrig
- Skilljack 2
- Skillwires 2

TRANSYS-ERIKA: MENTAL GYMNAST

- Cerebral booster 3
- Commlink (Transys Avalon)
- Cyberears (Rating 2)
- Cybereyes (Rating 2)
- Datajack
- Mnemonic enhancer 3
- Simrig
- Skilljack 4
- Skillwires 4

TRANSYS-ERIKA: FRONT LINE MIND

- Cerebral booster 2
- Commlink (Transys Avalon)
- Cyberears (Rating 1)
- Cybereyes (Rating 1)
- Datajack
- Mnemonic enhancer 2
- Muscle toner 2
- Reaction enhancers 2
- Simrig
- Skilljack 6
- Skillwires 6
- Wired reflexes 1

SONY CYBERSYSTEMS: INFILTRATOR

- Commlink (Sony Ronin, DR 4)
- Cyberarm (forearm, left, Synthetic)
- Cyberarm (forearm, right, Synthetic)
- Enhanced articulation
- Skilljack 4
- Skillwires 4
- Wired reflexes 1

SONY CYBERSYSTEMS: FIELD OPERATIVE

- Commlink (Sony Ronin, DR 4)
- Cyberears (Rating 3)
- Cybereyes (Rating 3)
- Reflex recorder (Locksmith)
- Reflex recorder (Pistols)
- Wired reflexes 1

SONY CYBERSYSTEMS: ULTIMATE WARRIOR

- Commlink (Sony Ronin, DR 4)
- Cyberears (Rating 4)
- Cybereyes (Rating 4)
- Enhanced articulation
- Muscle augmentation 3
- Muscle toner 3
- Reflex recorder (Automatics)
- Reflex recorder (Unarmed Combat)
- Suprathyroid gland
- Wired reflexes 2

MCT: KAISATSU (POLICE)

- Commlink (MCT-5000, DR 5)
- Cyberears (Rating 1)
- Cybereyes (Rating 1)
- Datajack
- Skilljack 2
- Wired reflexes 1

MCT: ABUNAI (DANGEROUS)

- Muscle augmentation 2
- Muscle toner 2
- Reaction enhancers 3
- Wired reflexes 2

MCT: KURO (BLACK)

- Bone density augmentation 4
- Commlink (MCT-5000, DR 5)
- Enhanced articulation
- Muscle augmentation 4
- Muscle toner 4
- Orthoskin 4
- Reflex record (Pistols)
- Reflex recorder (Unarmed Combat)
- Suprathyroid gland
- Synaptic booster 3

GOD OVERWATCH IN THE CZ

The Grid Overwatch Division (GOD) still watches over activities inside the QZ and on the QZ Grid and the small megacorporate grids within the QZ. They are a little more lenient of activities on the Hub Grid and a little more stringent on the Megacorporate Grids, even acting against the megacorporations themselves to prevent their hackers from trying to break the quarantine. See the **GOD Score Changes Table** for the new Overwatch Score limits (p. 208).

GOD SCORE CHANGES TABLE

GRID	CONVERGENCE SCORE
Public	60
Hub	50
Megacorporate	30

NEW DEVICES

MADAR (MAGNETIC DEFLECTION ARRAY)

The MADAR system currently in development by Ares through MIT&T is a look at the future of body armor: a system that doesn't have to stop and absorb kinetic energy and instead deflects and decreases it through the use of room-temperature super magnets. The design is being worked on by other megacorporations, but MIT&T's prototype is the furthest along.

The MADAR system offers two significant advantages. Attackers making any kind of Ranged attack against someone with an active MADAR system suffer a -2 dice pool penalty on all shots fired from outside point-blank range (meaning within melee range). The DV of all attacks made against a person with an active MADAR system are decreased by 1 per range category (see **MADAR Effects** table, below).

The system also has a few drawbacks. The active MADAR system creates a Noise penalty of -6 for a 0.5 meter-radius sphere around the user. This penalty is often enough to completely disrupt any hacking efforts in the targeted area. The field also has a pair of weak points. Any Ranged attack from above or below the user, based on a head-to-foot axis, doesn't suffer any penalty and increases its DV by 2 due to the shape of the field speeding the projectile toward the target. This means going prone opens the user to a world of possible hurt.

The second major drawback is specifically horrible to people inside the QZ or swimming off the Great Barrier Reef. The active field attracts ragers (and sharks) by creating a sort of electromagnetic void that draws their attention.

MICROWAVE GUN

MADAR EFFECTS

EFFECT
-2 Ranged attack penalty
-1 DV per Range Category
+2 DV Ranged attacks from above or below

Microwave weapons aren't new but most models suffer from slow buildup, excessive power usage, and they sometimes don't really damage the target, which is kind of a big problem. This model, though, does it all.

This model of microwave gun fires a short high-intensity burst of microwave radiation that excites molecules to the point of cooking them. This model also has a secondary setting that fires slightly larger but lower frequency bursts designed to damage electronics. When using this setting not only does a piece of electronics suffer Matrix damage, but if the electronics are

WEAPON ATTRIBUTES

WEAPON	ACC	DAM	AP	MODE	RC	AMMO	AVAIL	COST
Microwave Gun (high frequency)	6	7P	–6	SS	—	Special	20R	NA
Microwave Gun (low frequency)	4	10P*	—	SS	—	Special	20R	NA
Repeating Laser	7	7P*	–8	SA/BF/FA	—	10(c) or external	16F	NA

FIELD RATING TABLE

POWER SETTING	0M–4M	4M–8M	8M–12M	12M–16M	16M–20M	20M–30M
1	–1	—	—	—	—	—
2	–2	–1	—	—	—	—
3	–3	–2	–1	—	—	—
4	–4	–3	–2	–1	—	—
5	–5	–4	–3	–2	–1	—
6	–6	–5	–4	–3	–2	–1

on someone's person the target feels a mild tingling as their device begins to spark and fizzle. This attack has to be directed at a specific piece of equipment or point on the body the attacker thinks has the electronics. The wider shot gives the gun a better chance of hitting the smaller target. That means a Called Shot targeting a specific piece of equipment that is a quarter square meter or smaller inflicts only a –2 penalty, instead of the customary –4. If Called Shot is not used and a character scores a hit with a microwave gun, the gamemaster can choose which piece of equipment on the target character is hit.

This weapon uses Light Pistol ranges. It is powered by peak-discharge battery packs (p. 52, *Run & Gun*) and uses one charge for low frequency shots, two for high frequency shots

REPEATING LASER

Welcome to the future. Ares may have blown it big time with the Excalibur, but their laser weapons are searing a path straight into the realms of science fiction.

The current models they are developing do not have cool casings or names yet, but they are fully functional and ready to take on the streets, though so far they have only done so in the hands of specially trained Ares Firewatch officers. The weapons are expected to soon make it into the hands of specialized forces such as Knight Errant SWAT.

This weapon uses SMG ranges and suffers a decrease in the weapon's DV of 1 for each Range category beyond Short (Medium –1, Long –2, Extreme –3). Laser weapons are also affected by particulate matter in the air that reduce the beam's focus, meaning that Environmental Visibility Conditions (p. 175, *SR5*) also affect DV. Decrease the DV by 1 for each level of Visibility modifiers (Light –1, Moderate –2, Heavy –3).

Portable laser weapons derive their power from peak-discharge battery packs (p. 52, *Run & Gun*). Stationary or vehicle mounted laser weapons are often directly linked to energy sources.

Laser weapons require the Exotic Ranged Weapon (Laser Weapons) skill to use.

They may mount underbarrel and top mounted accessories only and cannot be modified in any way.

CRAZY-REPELLER

The "crazy-repeller," as Dr. Brain calls it, is an electromagnetic emitter that creates a low-level field that makes head cases uncomfortable. This keeps ragers and shamblers away from the area where the field is created. For more intelligent head cases, the field is a sign that something is up in the area, creating a distraction penalty to all actions equal to the Field Rating (see **Field Rating** table, above).

The device's battery is limited but can be preserved by running the device on a lower-power setting. The maximum power setting is equal to the Rating of the device, and the device uses one unit of power for each point of Rating each hour of operation (e.g., operating at Rating 6 for an hour takes six units of power, while operating at that strength for two hours uses twelve units of power). The standard battery in any device has 10 units of power. The doctor also has a power plug and a solar collector that can be used to recharge the power units at a rate of 1 per minute and 2 per hour, respectively.

Smart head cases that force their weaker-minded kin into the field can see the effects as the kin become more and more disoriented and suffer the same distraction penalties.

DISSONANCE TECHNOS

Technomancers who worship the Dissonance have found a way to stave off Fading and augment their powers with the dark energy of chaos and codebreaking. The increase in power comes at a cost, though. Dissonant technomancers are mentally scarred by their connection to the chaotic code and can never return to the Resonance. Dissonant technomancers are intended as dark forces and not intended for player use.

DTs can use a technique similar to blood magic. By causing harmful biofeedback damage to themselves or others, they can ignore the Fading from Threading.

DTs gain one of the technomancer Submersion abilities for every point of Dissonance they have, making them gain more power at a faster rate than their more sane kin. They also, though, lose either a point of Logic or Intuition for each point of Dissonance.

DRAGON LEY LINE

Any arcane abilities aligned to draconic magic or dragon-related totems in the area near a dragon ley line gains bonuses as if there were a background count aligned to draconic magic (see **Background Count**, p. 30, *Street Grimoire*). Add the background count to the limit for any spells cast in this area, meaning an increase in the potential power of the spell and the amount of energy that can be channeled safely by dragon magic. Those not using dragon-aligned magic suffer a dice pool penalty equal to the background count for any rolls using their arcane abilities.

For dragon-aligned adepts, add the background count to their limit for any roll involved in using their powers. Those not using dragon-aligned magic suffer a dice pool penalty equal to the background count for any rolls involving using a power. Adepts may opt to turn passive adept powers off using a Simple Action to avoid penalties that outstrip the benefits of their power.

The ley line in Boston snakes from the Rox up through South Boston, into the Hub, up through Revere, over towards Saugus, then Lynn, and ending in Salem. The background count at the heart of the line (an approximately fifteen-meter-wide path) is 10, and it then drops by 1 every 10 meters. The entire line is about 215 meters wide; it is detectable through Assensing on the astral, but not noticeable in any other way other than the boost (or penalty) in arcane power it offers.

Also of note is the rising Background Count inside the QZ. Safe areas, such as enclaves or protected towns, don't have a Background Count. Everywhere else within the QZ has a Background Count of at least 1. Areas highly infested with head cases will have a Background Count of 3 or greater created by the fearful minds trapped within the head cases' skulls.

SUPPLY DROPS

The supply drops being made seem like such a nice thing, but when was the last time any megacorporation did anything out of the kindness of their heart? In actuality, the supply drops are tools for the megacorporations on the outside to do a variety of things. The drops made near or on megacorporate property are usually clean and full of useful (and sometimes illegal) items. The drops that are made into other areas (the public areas, such as the Rox, the Wilds, Salem, etc.) have decent supplies but also have experimental drugs, inoculations, antibiotics, and other fun additives, as the corps that are dropping them are looking try out experimental cures on a population of potential lab rats who will be well contained for the foreseeable future.

The supply drops occur frequently and sometimes in bulk as cargo planes fly over and drop pallet after pallet of supplies, each with a parachute and a guidance system that leads them to a specific destination. These guidance systems can be hacked to redirect the pallets, but without any independent form of propulsion, there is only so far that they can be moved. The altitude of the pallet when the system is hacked determines how far it can be moved off course. The more Noise a hacker is willing to deal with, the further they can push the supplies off target. The hacker can redirect the pallet a number of meters equal to the distance above the ground when they gain control. (i.e. a pallet successfully controlled at an altitude of 400 meters can be pushed 400 meters off course.

Hackers have 4 Combat Turns per 100 meters of altitude to attempt the hack.

The effects of the supply drops on people inside the QZ can fuel a lot of stories. Eventually a level of distrust will develop for the pallets and supplies, and then hunger and need will battle with distrust. As this grows, the more powerful groups will start taking prisoners to test out pallet supplies. Some of the arms manufacturers might also drop in prototype firearms to be field-tested with the local gangs and criminals while they monitor the results over the Matrix through onboard electronics and camera systems.

NOISE

Everywhere in the QZ has at least a low level of Matrix noise thanks to the nanites in the air, on the buildings, and in the residents. Noise plays a big part in preventing the people inside the QZ from communicating with those outside. **Noise in the QZ** details the differences in noise between the QZ and the regular world.

NOISE IN THE QZ

The QZ is a strange place. It is a physically isolated and locked-down metroplex where some parts are actively trying to maintain their collective sanity through holding tight to the norms of life, including active and fre-

quent use of the Matrix and trying to maintain business as usual as much as possible, while other areas bask in the post-apocalyptic revelry fueled by the anarchic conditions on the ground. The ivory towers want to keep communications open between their people inside the towers and around the QZ, the anarchists want to de-stabilize large institutions everywhere, including the Matrix, and they want to get their message out, while other residents of the QZ just want to be able to contact those close to them and call for help if they need it. All of this is impeded by the QZ secforce that wants to make sure the world outside gets nothing from the world inside. Add onto all this the fact that many of the nanites, or at least fragments of them, are still in the air and in the heads and bodies of the head cases, and you get a jammed and limited Matrix in the QZ. The nanites in the air and the active jamming being pumped into the QZ by the secforce, along with the loss of a number of transmitting stations and other local interference, limit immediate Matrix detection to 50 meters, and noise in the QZ builds up quickly. See the QZ Noise and Matrix Use table below.

QZ NOISE AND MATRIX USE

DISTANCE FROM DEVICE	NOISE RATING
0 – 50 meters	0
50 – 100	1
100 – 200	2
200 – 300	3
300 – 400	4
400 – 500	5
500 – 600	6
600 – 700	7
700 – 800	8
800 – 900	9
900 – 1000	10

QZ NEIGHBORHOOD	AMBIENT MATRIX NOISE LEVEL
QZ Land Borders	10
QZ Water Borders	8
The Hub	2
Salem	4
The Wilds	3
The Rox	3
Urban	3
Non-urban	5

CHARACTER TROVE

AARON CREECH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PROJECT ANALYSIS

As a transhumanist with extensive alterations, Creech was easily infected with the CFD virus. He's leanly built, with sharp facial features. He wears a fine three-piece suit with a damaged ID nametag that says only part of his name, a small clue that he is not totally himself. He's smart, with a whip-quick wit, and he speaks in a deep-toned but sharp clip. He is excited to work with runners and treats them with a mix of fear and idolization.

His initial goal is the protection of Evo and putting the company in a good spot after the quarantine lifts, but the goals shift as his infection worsens and he begins to gather specimens and works towards creating the ultimate transhuman through cyber, bio, genetech, and CFD infection.

ANCIENTS COMBAT MAGE

METATYPE: DWARF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	RES
8(+2)	4(6)	3(4)	6(8)	7(12)	5(10)	4(9)	5(10)	3	3.13	5

Initiative	7(13) + 2D6
Condition Monitor	12/12
Limits	Physical 8(10), Mental 7(14), Social 7(12)
Armor	11
Skills	Computer 4, Con 5, Cybercombat 4, Cybertechnology 5, Etiquette 5 (Corporate +2), Hacking 4, Hardware 4, Negotiations 4, Pilot Aircraft 2, Pistols 5, Sneaking 4, Software 4
Qualities	Focused Concentration 6
Living Persona	DR - 8, A - 7, S - 5, D - 6, F - 12
Complex Forms	Infusion of Firewall, Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance Spike, Static Veil, Transcendent Grid
Augmentations	[all betaware] Bone density augmentaton 2, cerebral booster 2, commlink (Fairlight Caliban), datajack, muscle augmentation 2, muscle toner 2, image link, orthoskin 2, platelet factories, tailored pheromones 3, smartlink, sound link, synaptic booster 1
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 1, select sound filter 2], glasses [Capacity 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, vision enhancement 1, vision magnification], Transys Avalon commlink
Weapons	Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 10(c), w/ internal smartlink]

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

When people imagine the Ancients, they imagine these guys. Riding their combat-tweaked Mirages, slinging spells at all who oppose them, they blaze into combat like the furies of Greek legend.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
2	5	3	2	5	3	5	1	6.0	3

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Condition Monitor	11
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 6, Social 9
Armor	16
Skills	Computer 4, Con 5, Cybercombat 4, Cybertechnology 5, Etiquette 5 (Corporate +2), Hacking 4, Hardware 4, Negotiations 4, Pilot Aircraft 2, Pistols 5, Sneaking 4, Software 4
Active Skills	Assensing 3, Astral Combat 3, Automatics 4 (SMG +2), Banishing 3 (Fire Spirits +2), Blades 5, Counterspelling 5 (Combat Spells +2), First Aid 3, Perception 3, Pilot Ground Craft 4 (Wheeled +2), Pistols 3, Spellcasting 5 (Combat Spells +2), Summoning 4
Qualities	Distinctive Style, Prejudiced (Biased against non-elves)
Spells	Acid Stream, Armor, Ball Lightning, Clout, Combat Sense, Heal, Increase Agility, Increase Reflexes, Manaball, Mass Confusion, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor jacket, contacts [Capacity 2, w/ vision enhancement 2], sustaining focus [Force 4, manipulation, Armor]
Vehicles	Suzuki Mirage [Handling 5/3, Speed 6, Accel 3, Body 5, Armor 6, Pilot 1, Sensor 2, Passengers 1, standard weapon mounts (FN-HAR)]
Weapons	HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ 2 spare clips, 60 rounds explosive ammo] FN HAR [Assault Rifle, Acc 5 (7), DV 10P, AP –6, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 35 (c), w/ intergral smartlink, 100 rounds APDS ammo] Combat knife [Blade, Acc 6, Reach —, DV 4P, AP –3]

BANE-SIDHE RIGGER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Hating elves, and in particular, the Ancients, has pushed a rare few members of the Bane-Sidhe to take to rigging to battle the go-gang on their own turf.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
4	3	5.0	4	4	4	4	3	3.7

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	8 + 4D6
Condition Monitor	10
Limits	Physical 6(7), Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	9
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Computer 2, Electronic Warfare 6, Engineering skill group 5, Gunnery 6 (Remote Operation +2), Hardware 2, Navigation 4, Pilot Aircraft 5 (Remote Operation +2), Pilot Ground Craft 4 (Remote Operation +2), Pistols 2, Software 4
Qualities	Gearhead, Jury-rigger
Augmentations	Control rig 1, cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, vision magnification], datajack, reaction enhancers 3,
Gear	Armor vest [9], Renraku Sensei commlink, Maersk Spider RCC
Vehicles	GMC Bulldog Step-Van [Handling 3/3, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 16, Arm 12, Pilot 1, Sensors 2, Seats 6, w/ Rigger Adaptation]
Drones	C-D Dalmation Large VTOL Recon [Handling 5, Speed 5, Accel 3, Bod 5, Arm 5, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, w/ standard weapon mounted Ares Alpha] 2 x MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone Medium Flier [Handling 4, Speed 4, Accel 2, Bod 4, Arm 4, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, each w/ standard weapon mounted Ares Alpha] S-B Microskimmer [Handling 3, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 0, Arm 0, Pilot 3, Sensors 3] Steel Lynx Large Combat Drone [Handling 5, Speed 4, Accel 2, Bod 6, Arm 12, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, w/ heavy weapon mounted Stoner-Ares M202]
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ concealable holster] 4 x Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, SA/BF/FA, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –2, RC 2, 42 (c), w/ regular ammo, drone-mounted, underbarrel grenade launchers] (Launcher [Grenade Launcher, Acc 5(7), SS, 6 (c)]) 10 fragmentation grenades [Launched, DV 16P (f), +5 AP, –1/m blast] 10 smoke grenades [Launched, DV —, — AP, 10m radius smoke, 4 turns] Stoner-Ares M202 [Machine Gun, FA, Acc 5(7), DV 10P, AP –3, RC 3, 100 belt, w/ regular ammo, drone-mounted, external smartlink, gas-vent 3]

CEREUS

Cereus is a damaged but highly intelligent AI created by the merging of the Cerberus and Deus code on the servers at the MIT&T lab where Project Vulcan went awry. A creation full of the purest hatred for both of its parents, this creature wants nothing short of the destruction of both parents in every form and place. From the annihilation of the head cases in Boston to the death of Eliohann, it wants nothing left of the codes that spawned it and has no care for its brothers and sisters beyond its ability to use them before discarding their deleted husks.

METATYPE: AI

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
—	—	—	—	7	7	6	5	4	—

Matrix Initiative	14 + 4D6
Condition Monitor (M)	12
Limits	Physical —, Mental 10, Social 7
Armor	
Active Skills	Computer 8, Con 5, Cybercombat 8, Electronic Warfare 8, Gunnery 6, Hacking 8, Hardware 8, Pilot Aircraft 6, Pilot Ground Craft 6, Pilot Watercraft 6, Software 8
Matrix Attributes	DR - 8, A - 5, S - 6, D - 8, F - 7
Qualities	Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid])
Gear	Fairlight Caliban commlink, Triox UberMensch RCC [D-8, F-7]
Vehicles	GMC Bulldog Step-Van [Handling 3/3, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 16, Arm 12, Pilot 1, Sensors 2, Seats 6, w/ Rigger Adaptation] Ares Roadmaster Urban Armored Vehicle [Handling 3/3, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 18, Arm 18, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, Seats 8, w/ Rigger Adaptation] Samuvani Criscraft Otter Boat [Handling 4, Speed 3, Accel 2, Bod 12, Arm 6, Pilot 2, Sensors 2, Seats 8, w/ Rigger Adaptation]
Drones	C-D Dalmation Large VTOL Recon [Handling 5, Speed 5, Accel 3, Bod 5, Arm 5, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, w/ standard weapon mounted Ares Alpha] 3x Horizon Flying Eye Mini Flier [Handling 4, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 0, Arm 0, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, w/ built-in flashbang/smoke grenade] 2 x MCT Fly-Spy Mini Flier [Handling 4, Speed 2, Accel 2, Bod 1, Arm 0, Pilot 3, Sensors 3] 3 x MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone Medium Flier [Handling 4, Speed 4, Accel 2, Bod 4, Arm 4, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, each w/ standard weapon mounted Ares Alpha] S-B Microskimmer [Handling 3, Speed 3, Accel 1, Bod 0, Arm 0, Pilot 3, Sensors 3] Steel Lynx Large Combat Drone [Handling 5, Speed 4, Accel 2, Bod 6, Arm 12, Pilot 3, Sensors 3, w/ heavy weapon mounted Stoner-Ares M202]
Weapons	4 x Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, SA/BF/FA, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –2, RC 2, 42 (c), w/ smartgun system, regular ammo, drone-mounted, underbarrel grenade launchers] [Launcher [Grenade Launcher, Acc 5(7), SS, 6 (c)]] 10 Fragmentation grenades [Launched, DV 16P (f), +5 AP, –1/m blast] 10 Smoke grenades [Launched, DV —, — AP, 10m radius smoke, 4 turns] Stoner-Ares M202 [Machine Gun, FA, Acc 5(7), DV 10P, AP -3, RC 3, 100 belt, w/ regular ammo, drone-mounted, external smartlink, gas-vent 3]
Notes	Use intuition in place of Reaction for Pilot tests.

CHEN

Chen is an Asian ork, also known as an oni, complete with crazy skin color. He has a deep raspy voice and a cool demeanor. He's a cold professional. Succinct and to the point in everything he does. Always aware of the world around him, even when looking a runner in the eye.

METATYPE: ORK

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
7(+3)	5(9)	5(8)	8(12)	5	3	4	4	5	2.6

Initiative	12 + 4D6
Condition Monitor	12/11
Limits	Physical 10(13), Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	12
Active Skills	Archery 2, Armorer 5, Athletics skill group 5, Automatics 7, Close Combat skill group 6, Computer 3, Demolitions 2, Disguise 5, First Aid 2, Gunnery 5, Heavy Weapons 4, Influence skill group 8, Intimidation 6, Longarms 10 (Sniper Rifles +2), Navigation 3, Perception 7, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pistols 5, Sneaking 6, Survival 4, Throwing Weapons 6
Qualities	Distinctive Style (blue skin, red eyes, horns), Code of Honor (Assassin's Creed), Guts, High Pain Tolerance (3)
Gear	Armor jacket (12), earbuds [Capacity 4, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 2], glasses [Capacity 4, w/ image link, vision enhancement 2, thermographic vision]
Augmentations	[all deltaware] Titanium bone lacing, commlink (Fairlight Caliban), cyberears [Rating 4, w/ audio enhancement 3, balance augmenter, damper, select sound filter 6, sound link, spatial recognizer], cybereyes [Rating 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, retinal duplication 6, smartlink, thermographic, vision enhancement 3, vision magnification], datajack, datalock (Rating 12), muscle augmentation 4, muscle toner 4, orthoskin 4, synaptic booster (Rating 3)
Weapons	Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5(7), DV 11P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42(c), w/ 4 smartgun system, spare clips, 420 rounds regular ammo, 200 rounds explosive ammo, 150 rounds Stick 'n' Shock ammo (Grenade launcher [Heavy Weapons, Acc 4(6), DV 16P, AP –2, w/ 30 high explosive microgrenades (included in stats)]) Ares Crusader II [Machina Pistol, Acc 5, DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF, RC 2, 40(c), w/ 2 spare clips, 400 rounds regular ammo] Ares Desert Strike [Sniper Rifle, Acc 7, DV 14P, AP –5, SA, RC (1), 14(c), w/ bipod, 200 rounds explosive ammo (included in weapon stats)] Bow (Rating 8) [Bow, Acc 6, DV 10P, AP –1, w/ 20 arrows (Rating 8)] Combat knife [Blades, Reach —, Acc 6, DV 5P, AP –3] Enfield AS-7 [Shotgun, Acc 4(5), DV 13P, AP –1, SA/BF, RC —, 10(c), w/ laser sight] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ 2 spare clips, 280 rounds regular ammo] Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5, DV 9P, AP –2, SS, RC —, 6(cy)]

CITIZEN SOLDIERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 1)

Poorly trained, poorly equipped, but ready to defend what's theirs.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	6

Initiative	12 + 4D6
Condition Monitor	10
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 1, Close Combat skill group 2, Firearms skill group 2, Perception 2, Sneaking 1
Gear	Armor clothing (6), commlink (Device Rating 1)
Weapons	Defiance T-250 [Shotgun, Acc 4, DV 10P, AP –1, SS/SA, RC —, 5(m)] Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c)]

DANIEL JAMES "DJ" MCCARTHY

KNIGHT ERRANT DETECTIVE

A tall, leanly muscled elf, who is always wearing his glasses, DJ has a rather nerdy look. He speaks with a mild South Boston accent but works hard to hide his Southie roots. He really loves his job and his city and is extremely unhappy that he has been ordered to contact runners to help out the city in its time of need. He treats the runners with a cold and aloof demeanor and shows no sense of humor with them. Even struggling at the verge of unprofessionalism when he hires them. He gives them a minimum of information when offering work and is a strong negotiator.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	6	4(5)	3	4	4	5	6	3.7	5

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 6, Social 7
Armor	9
Active Skills	Automatics 3, Clubs 4, Computer 2, Diving 2 (Scuba +2), Etiquette 3 (Corporate, Street, Law Enforcement +2), First Aid 3, Leadership 4, Longarms 4 (Shotguns +2), Negotiations 5 (Bargaining +2), Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pilot Watercraft 3, Pistols 5, Running 3, Sneaking 3, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Home Ground (Street Politics [Boston]), Combat Paralysis
Augmentations	Datajack, smartlink, wired reflexes 1
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 1, select sound filter 1], flashlight, glasses [Capacity 2, w/ flare compensation, image link], headjammer (Rating 4), jammer (area, Rating 4), medkit (Rating 4), Renraku Sensei commlink, 10 restraints (plastic)
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, SA, Acc 6(8), DV 8P, AP –1, RC —, 14 (c), w/ internal smartlink] Extendable baton [Club, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 5P, AP –]

DEVIL'S COVEN WIZ GANGER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

As a small wiz gang in Boston, the Devil's Coven doesn't have a true turf of their own and thus move around, looking to lay claim to areas they find interesting.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	4	4(5)	3	4	4	5	4	3.7	5

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 6, Social 7
Physical Initiative	7 + 1D6
Active Skills	Assensing 3, Astral Combat 3, Banishing 3, Climbing 2, Counterspelling 4, Perception 3, Pistols 2, Ritual Spellcasting 3, Spellcasting 5, Summoning 4, Unarmed Combat 2
Spells	Acid Stream, Armor, Confusion, Detox, Heal, Ice Sheet, Increase Reflexes, Lightning Bolt, Manabolt, Stunball, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor vest [9], contacts [Capacity 2, w/ vision enhancement 2], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 2], gecko tape gloves, commlink (Device Rating 3)
Weapons	Ares Light Fire 70 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 6P, AP —, SA, RC —, 16(c), w/ silencer]

DISSONANT TECHNOMANCERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

These technomancers have been touched by the Dissonance, causing their minds to fall to the insanity and corruption of the darker side of the Resonance. They aren't all the same, except for the fact that they're all mad as hatters.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
3	2	2	2	6	5	4	5	6.0	5

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	6
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 8, Social 8
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	10 + 3D6
Active Skills	Automatics 3, Compiling 5, Computer 5, Con 3, Cybercombat 6, Decompiling 4, Electronic Warfare 5, Etiquette 3, Hacking 6, Hardware 3, Locksmith 4, Registering 5, Sneaking 2, Software 4
Qualities	Codeslinger (Snoop), Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid]), Prejudice (Vocal, against Technomancers)
Complex Forms	Diffusion of Attack, Diffusion of Firewall, Diffusion of Sleaze, Editor, Infusion of Attack, Infusion of Firewall, Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance Spike, Resonance Veil, Static Bomb, Static Veil, Stitches, Tattletale, Transcendent Grid
Gear	Armor clothing [6], data tap, earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 1], glasses [Capacity 4, w/ image link, low-light vision, vision enhancement 2], headjammer (Rating 6), MCT Fly Spy microdrone, 10 restraints (plastic)
Weapons	SCK Model 100 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP —, SA/BF, RC (1), 30(c)]

DR. BRAIN

Often called "MoM," Master of Magnetics, by his students, Dr. Brain is a kind and affable scientist. When the MCZ came about, Brain noticed very early on that those who seemed affected by the disease were staying away from the electromagnetics labs. When they lost power for a short time he witnessed their approach and then, when power returned, he watched them get repelled. That occurrence inspired him to develop the "Crazy-Repeller."

Brain stands 1.64m, weighs 5 9kg, has brown eyes, and greying salt-and-pepper hair that has disappeared from the crown of his head.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	4	3	3	4	5	5	5	4	5.9

Condition Monitor	10/11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 7, Social 7
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Biotech skill group 4, Computer 4, Hardware 3, Industrial Mechanic 8, Pistols (semi-automatics) 5 (+2), Software 4
Qualities	Jurynigger
Augmentations	Datajack
Gear	Armor vest [9], 50 datachips (blank), earbuds [Rating 1, w/ select sound filter 1], glasses [Rating 1, w/ image link], Renraku Sensei commlink, 10 restraints (plastic)
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 14 (c), w/ laser sight]

DR. PENELOPE ANN XAVIER, PAX

Her salacious CAS drawl, sweet and slow as molasses, slips from her pencil-thin lips giving a feral look to a silver tongue. Raven hair, with defiant eyes full of pride and something else, something deadly and dangerous, complete this evil beauty.

Dr. Xavier—"Call me Penny"—seems the epitome of a happy corporate doctor. She treats the runners like friendly tools early on and will change to a darker, colder, crazier, persona as the runners gain more trust with her group. Early on her goals seem altruistic as she seeks to free the oppressed technomancers and manipulated and mutilated cyborg technomancers that are trapped in Boston. As the trust grows, so does her openness and possibly the revelation or realization that she is the notorious Pax.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	RES
2	5	4	3	6	6	5	7	5	6.1	8

Condition Monitor	10/11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 8, Social 9
Physical Initiative	9 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	11 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Blades 4, Cybertechnology 6, Compiling 8, Computer 6, Cybercombat 10, Decompiling 6, Electronic Warfare 8, First Aid 3, Hacking 4, Hardware 2, Influence skill group 7, Medicine 5, Pilot Aircraft 3, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pilot Watercraft 5, Pistols 5, Registering 8, Sneaking 5, Software 9
Qualities	Exceptional Attribute (Charisma), Focused Concentration 4, Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid]), Natural Hardening
Living Persona	DR - 8, A - 7, S - 5, D - 6, F - 12
Complex Forms	Cleaner, Diffusion of Attack, Diffusion of Sleaze, Diffusion of Data Processing, Diffusion of Firewall, Editor, Infusion of Attack, Infusion of Sleaze, Infusion of Data Processing, Infusion of Firewall, Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance (Dissonance) Channel, Resonance (Dissonance) Spike, Resonance (Dissonance) Veil, Static Bomb, Static Veil, Tattletale, Transcendent Grid
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 4, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 2], glasses [Capacity 4, w/ image link, vision enhancement 2, low-light vision], headjammer (Rating 6), medkit (Rating 6), Fairlight Caliban commlink
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 14 (c), w/ laser sight]

DR. VOLT

One of the brightest minds on the MIT&T campus, Dr. Volt is one of the leading independent researchers on brain functions in the world. Unwilling to allow his research to be directed by corporate greed, he works hard at both developing his studies and reaching out for independent financial support.

He's trapped in the MCZ but is using his advanced knowledge of the human brain to try to determine what is causing the deranged behavior of the "encephalitis" victims. He realized very early on in his studies that the encephalitis is being caused by nanites but he does not know what the nanites were carrying or what they are doing inside the people they infect.

He stands 1.67m, weighs 68.2kg, has blue eyes and a wild mess of brown hair that covers his receding hairline.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	4	3	3	5	7	5	4	5	5.9

Condition Monitor	10/11
Armor	0
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 8, Social 7
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Biotech skill group 11, Computer 4, Hardware 3, Negotiations 5, Pistols 2 (Tasers +2), Software 4
Qualities	Analytical Mind, Exceptional Attribute (Logic)
Augmentations	Datajack
Gear	50 datachips (blank), earbuds [Rating 1, w/ select sound filter 1], glasses [Rating 1, w/ image link], Renraku Sensei commlink, 10 restraints (plastic), respirator (Rating 4), 30 stealth tags, crazy-repeller
Weapons	Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, Sa, RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts]

FENRIR WOLF

CANIS LUPUS AESIRI

Habitat: Forests

Range: Germany, Scandinavia, and far Eastern Europe

Frequency: Uncommon

Identification: The fenrir wolf is a large canine, standing 150 centimeters tall with a length of 220 centimeters. It can weigh up to 150 kilograms. It has short, dense fur that can be white, cream, red, brown, grey, black, or a mottled pattern mix. It has well-developed canines and curved claws. Females are typically smaller than males.

Habits: The fenrir wolf is the Awakened version of the common European wolf. It is a nocturnal carnivore that hunts in packs of six to eight members. It is fearless, and it attacks all manner and sizes of targets. It is territorial, though deaths in territorial fights are infrequent. It is highly resistant to magic, strong beyond its size, able to crush bone in its jaws, and the most feared predator in Europe. Farmers hire armed security to protect cattle from roving packs.

Fenrir wolf packs have both an alpha male and an alpha female. Females can have up to six pups in a den that is dug among bushes or rocks. While the male will bring home food for the caring female and pups, he will also kill off weaker pups or entire litters if necessary so that only the strongest join the pack. Fenrir wolves have a lifespan of ten years.

The numbers of fenrir wolves are kept low by a shortage of suitable habitat and hunting. As with the golden boar, the German government's protection of the Black Forest and Saeder-Krupp's species protection program has helped stabilize fenrir wolf numbers, though not without some resistance. S-K has also worked out a breeding program to produce fenrir wolves for security. The corporation takes pups that would have otherwise been killed by an alpha male. Such security animals fetch a high price on the market, as it's almost impossible to tame a wild fenrir.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	M
9	6	5	9	5	2	6	2	0.0	6

Condition Monitor	13/11
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Armor	0
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 5, Social 5
Physical Initiative	11 + 2D6
Active Skills	Counterspelling 6, Intimidation 5, Perception 6 (Smell +2), Running 6, Sneaking 4, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Fear, Guard (Self), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 13P, AP –2)

HEAD CASE EVO MARINE

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

The world knows the Tír Ghosts, the Sioux Wildcats, and the UCAS Navy SEALs, but somehow the Evo Marines are overlooked. And they don't mind that at all. These troops are the fist of Evo, and though they are known more for their accepting EvoCulture, they have been slapped around enough to know the importance of a strong arm on a smiling face. Oh, and these ones are infected with the CFD virus, making them stronger, faster, and a lot less predictable.

METATYPE: ORK

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
8(+3)	4(6)	4(6)	6(8)	3	2	3	2	2.6	(NV)

Condition Monitor	12(+NV)
Armor	16
Limits	Physical 8(10), Mental 4, Social 3
Physical Initiative	7(9) + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Automatics 5 (specialty as needed +2), Close Combat skill group 6, Computer 1, Cybercombat 4, Demolitions 3, First Aid 3 (Combat Wounds +2), Gunnery 3, Heavy Weapons 4, Intimidation 4, Longarms 5 (specialty as needed +2), Navigation 3, Perception 4, Pistols 5, Sneaking 4, Survival 4, Throwing Weapons 5
Qualities	High Pain Tolerance (3), Toughness
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 2 + NV, S - 3 + NV, D - 2 + NV, F - 3 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	Armor jacket (12), Climbing gear, commlink (Device Rating 5), flashlight, fas mask, jammer (area, Rating 2), medkit (4), micro-tranceiver, Survival kit
Augmentations	(all betaware) bone density augmentation 2, cyberears [Rating 1, damper, select sound filter 3], cybereyes [Rating 2, flare compensation, low-light vision, smartlink], datajack, dermal plating 4, muscle replacement 2, wired reflexes 2
Weapons	Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5(7), DV 11P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42(c)] Grenade launcher [Heavy Weapons, Acc 4(6), DV 16P, AP –2, w/ 30 high explosive microgrenades (included in stats)] or HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c)] or Enfield AS-7 [Shotgun, Acc 4(5), DV 13P, AP –1, SA/BF, RC —] or Ingram Valiant [LMG, Acc 5(6), DV 9P, AP –2, BF/FA, RC 2(3), 50(c)] or Ares Desert Strike [Sniper Rifle, Acc 7, DV 14P, AP –5, SA, RC (1), 14(c), w/ bipod] Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c)] Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, Sa RC —, 4(m)] Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 10P, AP —] Combat knife [Blades, Reach —, Acc 6, DV 5P, AP –3] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius] Thermal smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] High-explosive grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 16P, AP –2, Blast –2/m]

HEAD CASE HATERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Seething with a burning rage they cannot quench, haters are often the most dangerous of head cases. Combining the anger of the ragers with the focus of manipulators, they plot and execute every action they can that will hurt the target of their hate. Most in Boston hate two things, technomancers and NeoNET, but their hatred can be for anything.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
4	5	4	3	5	4	5	6	6.0	(NV)

Condition Monitor	11(+NV)
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 6, Social 8
Physical Initiative	9 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	10 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Compiling 3, Computer 3, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 4, Hacking 4, Hardware 2, Influence skill group 4, Pistols 3, Sneaking 2, Software 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 5 + NV, S - 3 + NV, D - 3 + NV, F - 3 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance Spike, Static Bomb
Gear	Armor vest [9]
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ spare clip, 110 rounds regular ammo] Knife [Blade, Reach —, Acc 5, DV 4P, AP –1]

HEAD CASE HIDDEN

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

The basics here are for an average human, but the hidden can be anyone, and possibly anything. Head cases with the level of mental capacity to understand what they are come in all shapes and sizes, including mammals of raccoon size and larger.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	6.0	(NV)

Condition Monitor	10(+NV)
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 4, Social 6
Physical Initiative	8 + 2D6
Matrix Initiative	10 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 1, Influence skill group 4, Compiling 3, Computer 4, Cybercombat 4, Electronic Warfare 4, First Aid 1, Hacking 4, Hardware 2, Pistols 3, Sneaking 4, Software 4
Qualities	Codeslinger (Hide), Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid])
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 5 + NV, S - 1 + NV, D - 4 + NV, F - 2 + NV
Complex Forms	Cleaner, Editor, Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	Armor vest [9]
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ spare clip, 110 rounds regular ammo]

HEAD CASE MANIPULATORS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

It's the quiet ones you have to worry about. These infected subjects are focused at working behind the scenes to further their goals. They aren't combat monsters like some of their kin, they are the honey to the ragers' vinegar.

METATYPE: DWARF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
5	3	3	4	6	5	5	6	6.0	(NV)

Condition Monitor	10(+NV)
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 7, Social 8
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	10 + 3D6
Active Skills	Compiling 5, Computer 4, Cybercombat 6, Electronic Warfare 4, First Aid 4, Hacking 6, Hardware 2, Influence skill group 7, Pilot Aircraft 3, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pilot Watercraft 2, Pistols 3, Sneaking 4, Software 5
Qualities	Codeslinger (Snoop), Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid]), Combat Paralysis
Living Persona	DR - (NC), A - 5 + NC, S - 1 + NC, D - 4 + NC, F - 2 + NC
Complex Forms	Editor, Infusion of Firewall, Infusion of Sleaze, Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance Spike, Static Veil, Tattletale, Transcendent Grid
Gear	Armor clothing [6], earbuds [Capacity 1, w/ select sound filter 1], glasses [Capacity 1, w/ image link]
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c)] Fist [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 6, DV 4S, AP –]

HEAD CASE RAGERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

Fast and furious, ragers are crazed and ready to rip apart any and everything in their path. As they charge in to attack their opponents, they will lash out with their minds and attack any electronic device they can detect.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
4	4	4	4	4	2	4	3	6.0	(NV)

Condition Monitor	10(+NV)
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 6
Physical Initiative	8 + 2D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 5, Cybercombat 4, Electronic Warfare 4, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 6
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 5 + NV, S - 1 + NV, D - 4 + NV, F - 2 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	None
Weapons	Unarmed [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 6, DV 5P, AP –]

HEAD CASE SHAMBLERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 1)

Slow and stumbly but powerful in groups. Though dumb, they use Teamwork (p. 49, *SR5*) for melee when group attacking with every other shambler aiding.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
3	3	3	3	5	1	3	1	0.6	(NV)

Condition Monitor	10(+NV)
Armor	0
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 4, Social 5
Physical Initiative	8 + 2D6
Active Skills	Cybercombat 3, Sneaking 2, Unarmed Combat 2
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 1 + NV, S - 5 + NV, D - 1 + NV, F - 5 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	None
Weapons	Unarmed [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 5, DV 4P, AP –]

HEAD CASE YNT SECURITY

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Yamatetsu Naval Technologies (YNT) is a division of Evo and as such, their employees still subscribe to the Evo-Culture, including extensive modification. Those mods made the CFD virus' work easy, and these officers have all succumbed to the infection. Now they secure the YNT shipyards for some nefarious purpose.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
4	4(5)	4(5)	4(5)	3	2	3	2	2.92	(NV)

Condition Monitor	10(+NV)
Armor	11
Limits	Physical 6(7), Mental 4, Social 4
Physical Initiative	8 + 2D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Automatics 3, Close Combat skill group 3, Computer 1, Cybercombat 3, First Aid 1, Intimidation 2, Longarms 3, Perception 3, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Sneaking 2, Throwing Weapons 2
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 2 + NV, S - 3 + NV, D - 2 + NV, F - 3 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	Armor vest (9), commlink (Device Rating 3), flashlight, medkit (3), micro-transceiver
Augmentations	(all betaware) Cyberears [Rating 1,w/ damper, select sound filter 3], cybereyes [Rating 1, w/ flare compensation, smartlink], dermal plating 2, muscle replacement 1, wired reflexes 1
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system] Yamaha Raiden [Assault Rifle, Acc 6(8), DV 11P, AP –2, BF/FA, RC 1, 60(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, smartgun system] or Enfield AS-7 [Shotgun, Acc 4(5), DV 13P, AP –1, SA/BF, RC —, 24(d), w/ laser sight] Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, Sa. RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius] Fragmentation grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 18P(f), AP +5, Blast –1/m]

HEAD CASE YNT SPECIAL SECURITY

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Evo, and by extension YNT, is one of the most metahuman-friendly megacorporations in the world. This means their metahuman employee percentages tend to be greater than other firms, and they can often create some very unique employment situations. Though they are not all trolls, many members of the YNT Special Security force (a combination executive protection, shadow asset group) are members of this hulking race.

METATYPE: TROLL

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
9(+3)	3(5)	3(5)	9(11)	2	2	3	1	.05	(NV)

Condition Monitor	13(+NV)
Armor	18
Limits	Physical 10(12), Mental 3, Social 2
Physical Initiative	8 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Automatics 5 (SMG +2), Clubs 4, Cybercombat 4, Heavy Weapons 5, Intimidation 4, Perception 4, Pistols 5, Throwing Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 7
Qualities	Guts, High Pain Tolerance (3), Toughness
Living Persona	DR - (NV), A - 1 + NV, S - 3 + NV, D - 2 + NV, F - 2 + NV
Complex Forms	Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike
Gear	Armor jacket (12), earbuds [Capacity 4, audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 2], commlink (Device Rating 4), glasses [Capacity 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartgun link], medkit (Rating 5)
Augmentations	(all betaware) Bone density augmentation 2, dermal plating 5, muscle replacement 2, platelet factories, smartlink, wired reflexes 2
Weapons	Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 2, Acc 5, DV 13P, AP —] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] High-explosive grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 16P, AP –2, Blast –2/m] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock smartgun system] Panther XXL [Heavy Weapons, Acc 5(7), DV 17P, AP -6, SS, RC -, 15(c), w/ smartgun system] Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5, DV 9P, AP –2, SS, RC —, 6(cy)] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius] Fist [Unarmed Combat, Reach 1, Acc 12(+nc), DV 12P, AP —]

HELLRIDERS COURIER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

One of those crazies with the skill and the focus to stay on task long enough to make deliveries. A little mayhem along the way never hurt anyone ... oh wait, yes it does.

METATYPE: TROLL

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
8	3	4(6)	8	3	3	4	1	4.9

Condition Monitor	12
Armor	11
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 5, Social 4
Physical Initiative	10 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	8 + 4D6
Skills	Automatics 2, Electronic Warfare 4, Etiquette 2, Gunnery 5, Navigation 1, Negotiation 3, Pilot Ground Craft 6, Pistols 5
Qualities	Allergy (sunlight, moderate), Gearhead
Augmentations	Control rig (Rating 1), datajack, reaction enhancer 2, smartlink, smuggling compartment
Gear	Armor jacket [12], Essy Motors DroneMaster RCC, medkit (Rating 6), sunglasses [Capacity 4, w/ low-light, flare compensation, vision enhancement 2], Erika Elite commlink (Device Rating 4)
Vehicles	Harley-Davidson Scorpion [Handling 4/3, Speed 4, Accel 2, Body 8, Armor 9, Pilot 1, Sensor 2, Passengers 1, rigger interface, 2 standard weapon mounts (Ares Alpha, Enfield AS-7)]
Weapons	Ares Light Fire 75 [Light Pistol, Acc 6 (8), DV 6P, AP —, SA, RC —, 16 (c), w/ integral silencer, smartgun system, 50 rounds regular ammo] Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 7P, AP -4, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system, 50 rounds regular ammo]
Weapons on Scorpion	Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5 (7), DV 11P, AP –6, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42 (c), w/ smartgun system, 100 rounds APDS ammo, grenade launcher] Ares Alpha grenade launcher [Grenade Launcher, Acc 4 (6), DV 18P(f), AP +5, SS, RC —, 6 (c), fragmentation (30 minigrenades) Enfield AS-7 [Shotgun, Acc 4 (6), DV 14P, AP –2, SA/BF, RC —,10 (c) or 24 (d), w/ smartlink, 100 rounds explosive ammo]

KNIGHTS OF RAGE DECKER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

When you work for Celedyr, and therefore NeoNET, being a decker is a good life. Top-of-the-line equipment and cyber are just the start. These guys are highly trained and some of the best in their field. They are also sanctioned by the megacorp and have no fear of GOD.

METATYPE: TROLL

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
4(+3)	4(8)	5(9)	4(6)	4	5	6	3	1.03	3

Condition Monitor	9
Armor	8
Limits	Physical 6(9), Mental 7, Social 4
Physical Initiative	15 + 4D6
Matrix Initiative	6 + Data Processing + 4d6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Automatics (SMG) 4 (+2), Computer 5, Cybercombat (Personas) 7 (+2), Electronic Warfare (Jamming) 6 (+2), First Aid 3, Hacking 7, Hardware 5, Perception (Visual) 4 (+2), Pistols 4, Sneaking 3, Software 5
Qualities	Codeslinger (Data Spike), Home Ground (Digital turf [NeoNET])
Augmentations	[all betaware] Bone lacing (titanium), cyberdeck (Transys Graygul [DR 6, AT 8 8 7 6, Prog 8, Av 16R, 789,475]), cybereyes (Rating 2, with flare compensation, low-light vision, thermographic vision, smartlink), datajack, muscle augmentation 2, muscle toner 4, reaction enhancer 2, wired reflexes 2
Gear	Armor jacket [12], data tap, earbuds [Capacity 4, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 2], Transys Avalon commlink, 10 restraints (plastic)
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c)] HK-227X [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system] Fist [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 9, DV 9P, AP —]

KNIGHTS OF RAGE GUARDS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

They may just be grunts, but they're Celedyr's personal grunts. Beware.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	M
6 (+4)	5(9)	4(7)	5(8)	4	3	5	4	2.92	4

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	17
Limits	Physical 7(10), Mental 5, Social 5
Physical Initiative	12 + 4D6
Active Skills	Archery 4, Athletics skill group 4, Automatics 6 (8) (Assault Rifle +2), Close Combat skill group 5, Computer 2, Demolitions 3, First Aid 4, Gunnery 3, Heavy Weapons 3, Intimidation 4, Navigation 3, Perception 5, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 5, Sneaking 4, Survival 2, Throwing Weapons 5
Qualities	Guts, High Pain Tolerance (3), Toughness
Initiate Grade	3
Metamagic	Adept Centering
Adept Powers	Combat Sense 4, Improved Ability (Automatics) 2, Mystic Armor 2
Gear	Armor jacket [12, chemical protection 3, fire resistance 3, non-conductivity 4], contacts [Capacity 3, w/ smartlink, vision enhancement 2], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 1], medkit (Rating 4, w/ 2 re-supplies), Renraku Sensei commlink (Device Rating 3), 2 trauma patches
Augmentations	[all betaware] Bone lacing (titanium), muscle augmentation 3, muscle toner 4, synaptic booster 3
Weapons	Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5(7), DV 11P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42(c), w/ smartgun system, 4 spare clips, 420 rounds regular ammo, 200 rounds explosive ammo, 150 rounds Stick-n-Shock ammo (Grenade launcher [Heavy Weapons, Acc 4(6), DV 16P, AP –2, w/ 30 high explosive microgrenades (included in stats)])] Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system] Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 10P, AP —] Flash-bang grenades (4) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system, 2 spare clips, 280 rounds regular ammo] Fist [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 10, DV 11P, AP —]

KNIGHTS OF RAGE MAGE

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

Working for a dragon provides a lot of arcane access. Libraries, power sites, training facilities, and research facilities are at the disposal of these arcane warriors whenever they desire.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG	M
4	3	4	2	6	5	4	5	6.0	2	3

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 7, Social 8
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Assensing 5 (Aura Reading +2), Astral Combat 5, Automatics 5 (SMG +2), Banishing 6, Blades 4, Counterspelling 7 (Combat +2), First Aid 4, Perception 5, Pistols 3, Spellcasting 8 (Combat Spells +2), Summoning 6 (Spirits of Fire +2)
Qualities	Focused Concentration 4
Initiate Grade	3
Metamagics	Centering (chant), Quickening, Shielding
Spells	Animate, Armor, Combat Sense, Confusion, Cure Disease, Detect Enemies (Extended), Fireball, Heal, Ignite, Improved Invisibility, Increase Reflexes, Influence, Light, Magic Fingers, Manaball, Mindlink, Physical Mask, Shadow, Stunball, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor jacket [12], contacts [Capacity 4, w/ image link, vision enhancement 2], fake license (magic, Rating 2), fake SIN (Rating 2), Low Lifestyle (2 months)

KNIGHTS OF RAGE, SEAN MCNULTY

The classic tale of the orphan boy made good is the history of Sean McNulty. Picked from an orphanage at the age of eight, Sean has been raised to work for Celedyr most of his life. His loyalty is unshakeable.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
6(+2)	5(8)	5(8)	4	4	3	3	5	3.44	3

Condition Monitor	11/10
Armor	10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 4
Physical Initiative	10(13) + 4D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 7, Automatics 5, Etiquette (Corporate) 3 (+2), Perception 7, Pistols (Semi-Automatics) 5 (6) (+2), Intimidation (Physical) 4 (+2), Negotiation 3, Pilot Ground Craft 4, Stealth skill group 4, Unarmed Combat (Subdual Combat) 5 (+2)
Qualities	Ambidextrous, Toughness
Augmentations	[all alphaware] Cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision, and vision enhancement (Rating 3)], datajack, plastic bone lacing, muscle toner 3, reflex recorder (Pistols), synaptic booster 3
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 2, w/ select sound filter 2], commlink (Device Rating 5), medkit (Rating 6), tranq patch (Rating 10), trauma patch (Rating 6)
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 7P, AP -4, SA, RC —,15 (c), w/ smartgun system] HK-227X [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system]

MCT/PETROVSKI ARCANE SECURITY SPECIALISTS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

These corporate wagemages have access to one of the best arcane research corporations in the world. Their standard uniform is custom armor with spots to add foci but a non-distinct enough appearance to avoid instant identification and the common "Geek the Mage" call out.

Most MCT ASSes operate with at least two bound spirits on standby, usually one earth and one air spirit. The spirits are used as backup and arcane support and the ASS usually prefers to avoid direct combat or a risk of disruption with the spirits but will do so to save their own life.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	M
4	3	3(6)	3	5	3	3	4	6.0	3

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 4(5), Mental 6, Social 7
Physical Initiative	8 + 3D6
Active Skills	Assensing 4, Astral Combat 3, Banishing 3, Blades 2, Counterspelling 5, First Aid 3, Perception 3, Pistols 3, Spellcasting 4, Summoning 4
Language Skills	English 3, Japanese N
Qualities	Focused Concentration 3
Spells	Armor, Ball Lightning, Clout, Combat Sense, Heal, Increase Reflexes, Manabolt, Mass Confusion, Stunball, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor jacket (12), contacts [Capacity 2, w/ vision enhancement 2], earbuds [Capacity 2, w/ audio enhancement 2], sustaining focus (Health, force 2, Increase Reflexes)
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 8P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ explosive ammo] Combat knife [Blade, Acc 6, Reach —, DV 4P, AP –3]

MCT/PETROVSKI ELECTRONIC SECURITY SPECIALISTS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Ever hack into MCT and see one of the samurai icons? These are the minds behind the persona.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	3	4 (6)	4	3	5 (7)	5	3	2.9

Condition Monitor	10
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5(6), Mental 6(8), Social 4
Physical Initiative	9(11) + 2D6
Matrix Initiative	9 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Close Combat skill group 2, Cracking skill group 5, Electronics skill group 4, Etiquette 4 (Corporate +2), Firearms skill group 2, Perception 4
Qualities	Codeslinger (Data Spike)
Gear	Armor vest (9), earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ select sound filter 3], commlink (Device Rating 4), stim patch (Rating 5), medkit (3), micro-tranceiver
Augmentations	Cerebral booster 2, cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ flare compensation, low-light vision, thermographic vision, and smartlink], datajack, reaction enhancers 1, wired reflexes 1
Cyberdeck	Hermes Chariot, Default Setting: Attack 5, Firewall 4, Data Processing 4, Sleaze 2, Programs Loaded: Blackout, Shell
Weapons	Colt Cobra TZ 120 [SMG, Acc 4(5), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC 2(3), 32(c), w/ folding stock, gas-vent 2, laser sight] Fichetti Security 600 [Light Pistol, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC (1), 30(c), w/ detachable folding stock, laser sight]

MCT/PETROVSKI SECURITY OFFICERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

These are the first in line around the Zero Zone. They tend to be the fall back and hold off the enemy until backup arrives types, but some will pop their jazz and bring the pain.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
4	5	4	4	4	3	4	3	6.0

Condition Monitor	10
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 5, Social 6
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Automatics 3, Close Combat skill group 3, Computer 1, First Aid 1, Intimidation 2, Longarms 3, Perception 3, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Throwing Weapons 2
Gear	Armor vest (9), earbuds [Capacity 1, w/ audio enhancement 1], commlink (Device Rating 3), flashlight, goggles [Capacity 2, w/ image link, lowlight vision], jazz (2 doses), micro-transceiver
Weapons	Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, Sa, RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts] Extendable baton [Club, Reach 1, Acc 6, DV 6P, AP —] SCK Model 100 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP —, SA/BF, RC (1), 30(c), w/ folding stock, smartgun system] Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15(c), w/ smartgun system]

MCT/PETROVSKI SECURITY RIGGERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Behold the legion of metal at their minds whim. These guys control a remarkable amount of firepower and they know it.

METATYPE: DWARF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
[illegible]								

Condition Monitor	12
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 8(9), Mental 6, Social 5
Physical Initiative	9(12) + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	11 + 4D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Close Combat skill group 4, Etiquette 4 (Corporate +2), Firearms skill group 3, Gunnery (Remote Operation) 4 (6), Perception 4, Pilot Aircraft 5 (7) (Rotorcraft +2), Pilot Ground Craft 5
Qualities	Guts
Gear	Armor vest (9), earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement, select sound filter 1], MCT Drone Web RCC (DR 6, D 7, F 6), stim patch (Rating 5), micro-tranceiver
Augmentations	Commlink [Transys Avalon (Device Rating 6) w/ hot-sim module], control rig 2, cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ flare compensation, low-light vision, thermographic vision, smartlink], datajack, reaction enhancers 3
Vehicles	Aztechnology Crawler [Walker Drone, Handling 4, Speed 3, Accel 1, Body 3, Armor 3, Pilot 3, Sensor 3] Cyberspace Designs Dalmatian [VTOL Drone, Handling 5, Speed 4, Accel 3, Body 5, Armor 5, Pilot 3, Sensor 3] GM-Nissan Doberman [Tracked Drone, Handling 5, Speed 3, Accel 1, Body 4, Armor 4, Pilot 3, Sensor 3, weapon mount (AK-97)] Lockheed Optic-X2 [VSTOL Drone, Handling 4, Speed 4, Accel 3, Body 2, Armor 2, Pilot 3, Sensor 3] 2 x MCT Fly-Spy [Aerial Drone, Handling 4, Speed 3, Accel 2, Body 1, Armor 0, Pilot 3, Sensor 3] MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone [Rotary Drone, Handling 4, Speed 4, Accel 2, Body 4, Armor 4, Pilot 3, Sensor 3, weapon mount (Ares Alpha)] MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone [Rotary Drone, Handling 4, Speed 4, Accel 2, Body 4, Armor 4, Pilot 3, Sensor 3, weapon mount (Yamaha Pulsar)] Shiawase Kanmushi [Walker Drone, Handling 4, Speed 2, Accel 1, Body 0, Armor 0, Pilot 3, Sensor 3] Steel Lynx [Wheeled Drone, Handling 5, Speed 4, Accel 2, Body 6, Armor 12, Pilot 3, Sensor 3, heavy weapon mount (Stoner-Ares M202)]
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 11P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system] Ares Crusader II [Machine Pistol, Acc 5, DV 8P, AP –1, SA/BF, RC 2, 40(c), w/ gas vent 2, smartgun system, explosive ammo] **GM-Nissan Doberman:** AK-97 [Assault Rifle, Acc 5, DV 10P, AP –6, SA/BF/FA, RC –, 38 (c), w/ APDS ammo] **MCT-Nissan Rotodrone 1:** Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5 (7), DV 10P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42 (c), w/ smartgun system] Ares Alpha grenade launcher [Grenade Launcher, Acc 4 (6), DV 16P, AP —2, SS, RC —, 6 (c), w/ 12 high-explosive minigrenades] **MCT-Nissan Rotodrone 2:** Yamaha Pulsar [Taser, Acc 5, DV 7S(e), AP –5, SA, RC —, 4 (m)] Steel Lynx: Stoner-Ares M202 [MMG, Acc 5 (7), DV 11P, AP –4, FA, RC —, 100 (belt), w/ explosive ammo]

MCT/PETROVSKI SECURITY SPECIAL RESPONSE OFFICERS

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

These are the second line of Zero-Zone enforcement. They function in small units and operate with precision.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
[illegible]	5(7)	5(7)	4(6)	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	2.64

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 6(8), Mental 5, Social 5
Physical Initiative	9(11) + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Automatics 5, Close Combat skill group 4, Computer 2, Demolitions 3, First Aid 2, Heavy Weapons 3, Intimidation 4, Longarms 5, Perception 4, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pistols 5, Sneaking 4, Survival 2, Throwing Weapons 4
Gear	Armor jacket (12), commlink (Device Rating 4), earbuds [Capacity 4, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 1, damper], flashlight, jammer (area, Rating 6), medkit (4), micro-transceiver
Augmentations	(all alphaware) Cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ flare compensation, low light vision, thermographic vision, and smartlink], muscle augmentation 2, muscle toner 2, wired reflexes 2
Weapons	Yamaha Raiden [Assault Rifle, Accuracy 6 (8), DV 7P, AP –2, RC 1, w/ integral sound suppressor, smartgun system] Combat knife [Blades, Reach —, Acc 6, DV 5P, AP –3] Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, Sa, RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts] Yamaha Pulsar [Taser, Accuracy 5, DV 7S(e), AP -5] Enfield AS-7 [Shotgun, Acc 4(5), DV 13P, AP –1, SA/BF, RC —, 10(c), w/ laser sight] Stun baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system, 2 spare clips, 280 rounds regular ammo] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius]

MILES FENMORE

This sick individual has snapped and let the quarantine dictate his actions. He's giving in to the urges he's suppressed for years and going out to kidnap subjects for his twisted sexual science experiment. He's thin and geeky and looks completely harmless, but he has a psychopathic side. He is far more likely to run from trouble than to fight and will try to avoid a confrontation with the runners if he can.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
[illegible]			3						

Condition Monitor	10/9
Armor	0
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 5, Social 5
Physical Initiative	5 + 1D6
Active Skills	Compiling 3, Con 4, Pistols 2, Sneaking 4, Software 3
Gear	Medkit (Rating 3), 100 restraints (plastic), 30 stealth tags
Weapons	Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, SA, RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts]

MINUTEMAN SECURITY ASSET PROTECTION SPECIALIST

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

The next step down from a personal bodyguard, these guys are trained to keep the company's assets safe.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
5 (+1)	4 (7)	4 (6)	4	3	3	3	3	3.52

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6(7), Mental 6, Social 6
Physical Initiative	11 + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Automatics 4, Etiquette 3 (Corporate +2), Perception 4, Pistols 4 (5) (Semi-Automatics +2), Intimidation 4 (Physical +2), Pilot Ground Craft 3, Stealth skill group 3, Throwing Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 4 (Touch Attack +2)
Qualities	Code of Honor (Civilians and noncombatants), Guts, High Pain Tolerance (3)
Gear	Actioneer business suit (9), commlink (Device Rating 4), medkit (Rating 4), tranq patch (Rating 10), trauma patch (Rating 6)
Augmentations	(all alphaware) Cyberears [Rating 3, w/ audio recording unit, damper, audio link, audio enhancement 3, select sound filter 2], cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision, vision enhancement 3], datajack, plastic bone lacing, muscle toner 3, reflex recorder (Pistols), synaptic booster 2
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, Acc 6(8), DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 14 (c), w/ smartgun system] HK-227X [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system] Shock gloves [Unarmed Combat, Reach —, Acc 7, DV 8S(e), AP –5] Flash-bang grenades (4) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius]

MINUTEMAN SECURITY

(NEONET TOWERS; PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

There are benefits to being corporate security for a megacorporation like NeoNET, especially in the access to good cyber. For just a little off their monthly paycheck, these guys have the chance to even the odds against runners looking to get into the Towers.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
4	4	3 (5)	3	3	3	3	3	4.52

Condition Monitor	10
Armor	8
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 5
Physical Initiative	6(8) + 1D6
Active Skills	Automatics 4, Close Combat skill group 4, Intimidation 4, Perception 4, Pistols 4, Sneaking 3, Throwing Weapons 3
Gear	Armor vest (9), Erika Elite commlink, goggles [Capacity 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink], jammer (area, Rating 4), medkit (3), micro-transceiver, respirator (3)
Augmentations	(all alphaware) Reaction enhancers 2
Weapons	Colt M-23 [Assault Rifle, Acc 4(6), DV 9P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC —, 40(c), w/ smartgun system] Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 5P, AP —] Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ spare clip, 110 rounds regular ammo] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius]

PROJECT VULCAN MAGES

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

With a focus heavy in the areas of detection and analysis, these mages have a wide array of spells to use in their studies. These stats are for a human, but the project has mages of all metatypes.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	M
3	3	4	4	6	6	6	4	6.0	6

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 6, Social 7
Physical Initiative	7 + 1D6
Active Skills	Alchemy 6, Arcana 5, Assensing 5, Astral Combat 3, Banishing 4, Blades 2, Counterspelling 5, First Aid 3, Perception 4, Pistols 4, Ritual Spellcasting 7, Spellcasting 8, Summoning 6
Qualities	Focused Concentration 3, High Pain Tolerance 3
Spells	Analyze Device, Analyze Magic, Analyze Truth, Clairaudience, Clout, Combat Sense, Decrease Reaction, Detect Individual, Heal, Increase Reflexes, Lightning Bolt, Magic Fingers, Manaball, Mass Confusion, Mind Probe, Shatter, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor jacket, contacts [Capacity 3, w/ image link, vision enhancement 1, vision magnification], Renraku Sensei commlink
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ 75 rounds of regular ammo] Combat knife [Blade, Acc 6, Reach —, DV 7P, AP –3]

ROXX "SOLDATO"

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 2)

Brutes who hope to one day be a real soldato for the mafia families of Boston.

METATYPE: ORK

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
7	4	4(5)	7	3	2	2	3	4.6

Condition Monitor	12
Armor	11
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 3, Social 5
Physical Initiative	6(7) + 1D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Auto Mechanics 1, Automatics 4, Close Combat skill group 4, Computer 1, Con 3, First Aid 1, Intimidation 4, Longarms 3, Perception 3, Pilot Ground Craft 2 (Wheeled +2), Pistols 2, Sneaking 3, Survival 1 (Urban +2), Throwing Weapons 3
Qualities	Home Ground [Street Politics]
Gear	Armor vest (9), jazz (4 doses), earbuds [Capacity 2, w/ audio enhancement 1, select sound filter 1], Erika Elite commlink, goggles [Capacity 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartgun link], medkit (3), two micro-transceivers
Augmentations	Dermal plating 2, reaction enhancer 1, retractable spur
Weapons	Ares Crusader II [Machine Pistol, Acc 5, DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF, RC 2, 40(c), w/ gas-vent 2, smartgun system, 2 spare clips, 400 rounds regular ammo] PJSS Model 55 [Shotgun, Acc 6, DV 11P, AP –1, SS, RC (1), 2(b), w/ integrated shock pad, 20 rounds explosive ammo] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smart gun system, 2 spare clips, 280 rounds regular ammo]

SANDELERRO

Meso-american human with a few mean-looking scars on his face and hands. He is a blood mage and casts with an almost giggly voice with neo-nahuatl (mix of Spanish and Native American) accent. He is remarkably happy and twisted and treats the runners as inferior to him but with that jovial pleasantness as if it is universally understood that he's better, not with the snobbishness and cold superiority of some snobs.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG	M
4	5	4(7)	4	6	4	4	5	6.0	4	3

Condition Monitor	10/11
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 6(7), Mental 6, Social 8
Physical Initiative	8(11) + 1D6(4D6)
Active Skills	Arcana 4, Assensing 5, Astral Combat 7, Banishing 6, Blades 4 (Knives +2), Counterspelling 6, First Aid 3, Perception 5, Pistols 2, Spellcasting 8, Summoning 8
Qualities	Distinctive Style, Focused Concentration 4, Spirit Affinity (Earth)
Initiate Grade	3
Metamagics	Centering, Quickening, Shielding
Spells	Agony, Armor, Ball Lightning, Clout, Combat Sense, Detect Life, Fireball, Heal, Increase Strength, Increase Reflexes, Levitate, Lightning Bolt, Manaball, Mass Confusion, Physical Barrier, Physical Mask, Powerbolt, Shadow, Stunbolt
Gear	Armor jacket (12), contacts [Capacity 2, w/ vision enhancement 2], earbuds [Capacity 2, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 1]
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5 (7), DV 7P, AP -4, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system, 50 rounds regular ammo] Combat knife (weapon focus, Force 2) [Blade, Acc 6, Reach —, DV 7P, AP –3]

SHANE O'CONNOR

Proud to be Irish but even prouder to be part of the O'Rilley family, Shane O'Connor has been working as a Johnson for the family for about five years, and before that he was muscle. He has a thick Boston accent and loves this city. He'll deal straight with anyone as long as he doesn't think they have ties to any anti-mob or anti-elf groups like the Knights of the Red Branch. He's coldly rude to any runners with connections to those organizations and focuses his dealings with the others. He's a genuinely upbeat guy and hasn't let the growing chaos of the QZ get to him.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
3	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	6.0	3

Condition Monitor	10/10
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 5, Social 7
Physical Initiative	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Automatics 4, Close Combat skill group 4, Computer 6, Data Search 8, Etiquette 8 (Street, Mafia +2), Intimidation 4, Negotiation 9, Perception 6, Pistols 5
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 1, w/ select sound filter 1], glasses [Capacity 1, w/ image link], Renraku Sensei commlink
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 14 (c), w/ laser sight]

SMEDLEY PEMBRENTON III

He is a well-dressed and heavily muscled troll with broad shouldered and no gut. His black hair is usually combed to accent the single horn on the left side of his head. He usually smokes expensive cigars and has a slight British accent with a slight rasp due to the smoking.

He worked the shadows in his youth and is a former member of Dunkelzahn's Watchers. Since he's worked with runners before, he treats them with the respect they deserve. If they deserve it. Respect is hard to earn from Pembrenton, but once it is earned he's pleasant enough.

His overall goal is to make the best of the quarantine and continue to supply and support the contacts and network he has already developed. Being a fixer is one of many enterprises he is heading up.

METATYPE: TROLL

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
9(+3)	4	4(6)	10(14)	5	5	4	4	0.52	4

Condition Monitor	13/11
Armor	20
Limits	Physical 8(15), Mental 7, Social 5
Physical Initiative	8(10) + 3D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 5, Clubs 5, Computer 2, First Aid 3, Heavy Weapons 9, Influence skill group 7, Perception 5, Pilot Aircraft 3, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pilot Watercraft 3, Pistols 7, Sneaking 3, Throwing Weapons 5, Unarmed Combat 7
Augmentations	[all betaware] Titanium bone lacing, commlink (Fairlight Caliban), cyberears [Rating 4, w/ audio enhancement 3, balance augmenter, damper, select sound filter 6, sound link, spatial recognizer], cybereyes [Rating 4, w/ flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic, vision enhancement 3, vision magnification], datajack, dermal plating (Rating 6), muscle augmentation 4, synaptic booster (Rating 2)
Gear	Armor jacket [12]
Weapons	Colt Government 2066 [Heavy Pistol, Acc 6(8), DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 14 (c), w/ internal smartgun system, silencer] Panther XXL [Heavy Weapons, Acc 5 (7), DV 17P, AP -6, SS, RC -, 15 (c), w/ internal smartgun system] Fist [Unarmed Combat, Reach 1, Acc 15, DV 17P, AP —]

STACE

Her cute little face and slightly vapid demeanor make Stace almost instantly adorable. She is a one of the hidden who is not quite sure what she is due to the lack of knowledge and fragmenting in the initial AIs. She's trying to figure it out with the others and make herself a protective little community through infection. She is paranoid, a leftover mental trait from the AIs' captivity, and so are all the copies of her, though others are expressing it in different ways. She's cute, petite, and kind of punk in her style and attitude. She definitely isn't into violence and would prefer a non-violent solution to problems but will resort to anything to stay free of captivity.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	RES
2	5	5	3	5(11)	5(11)	4(10)	5	6.3	2()

Condition Monitor	10/11(17)
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 7(15), Social 8(10)
Physical Initiative	9(15) + 2D6
Matrix Initiative	20 + 4D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 1, Influence skill group 4, Compiling 3, Computer 4, Cybercombat 4, Electronic Warfare 4, First Aid 1, Hacking 4, Hardware 2, Pistols 3, Sneaking 4, Software 4
Qualities	Codeslinger (Data Spike), Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid])
Living Persona	DR - 6, A - 6, S - 10, D - 11, F - 11
Complex Forms	Cleaner, Data Mask, Editor, Pulse Storm, Puppeteer, Resonance Spike, Stitches, Tattletale, Transcendent Grid
Gear	Armor vest [9]
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ spare clip, 110 rounds regular ammo]

STONEHAM SECURITY FORCE

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

The mundane guards of Stoneham may not be the most well armed or cybered to the gills, but they make up in skill what they lack in equipment.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
5	4	5	5	4	3	4	3	6.0

Condition Monitor	11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 6
Physical Initiative	9 + 1D6
Active Skills	Automatics 5 (Assault Rifle +2), Clubs 4 (Batons +2), First Aid 4 (Combat Wounds +2), Intimidation 5, Perception 4, Pilot Ground Craft 4, Pistols 6 (Semi-automatics +2), Sneaking 4 (Urban +2), Unarmed Combat 6
Qualities	Home Ground (The Transporter, Stoneham)
Gear	Armor vest (9), commlink (Device Rating 2), earbuds [Capacity 1, w/ select sound filter 1], flashlight, glasses [Capacity 3, w/ flare compensation, image link, lowlight vision], jazz (2 doses),
Weapons	Colt M-23 [Assault Rifle, Acc 4(5), DV 9P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC —, 40(c), w/ laser sight] or Defiance T-250 [Shotgun, Acc 4, DV 10P, AP –1, SS/SA, RC —, 5(m)] Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 7P, AP —] Fichetti Security 600 [Light Pistols, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC (1), 30(c), w/ detachable folding stock, laser sight] Uzi IV [SMG, Acc 4(5), DV 7P, AP —, BF, RC (1), 24(c), w/ integral folding stock, laser sight]

VORY HACKER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Known around the world as some of the best in the electronic infiltration business, the Vory have kept up that reputation with the new Matrix protocols.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	3	3 (4)	3	4	4	4	4	3.5

Condition Monitor	[illegible]
Armor	[illegible]
Limits	Physical 4(5), Mental 6, Social 6
Physical Initiative	8 + 2D6
Matrix Initiative	4 + Data Processing + 4D6
Active Skills	Automatics 3, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 4, Electronics skill group 5, Etiquette 2 (Street +2), First Aid 3, Hacking 5 (Hack on the Fly +2), Locksmith 4, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pistols 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Codeslinger (Brute Force)
Augmentations	Cerebral booster (Rating 1), cybereyes [Rating 1, w/ low-light, thermographic], datajack, wired reflexes 1
Gear	Armor vest [9], Sony CIY-720 cyberdeck [Device Rating 4, Atts 7 6 5 4, Programs 4], lockpick set, Meta Link commlink (Device Rating 1), medkit (Rating 6), programs (Armor, Biofeedback Filter, Encryption, Hammer, Signal Scrub)
Weapons	Ceska Black Scorpion [Machine Pistol, Acc 5, DV 6P, AP —, SA/BF, RC (1), 35 (c), w/ integral folding stock, 90 rounds regular ammo] Remington Roomsweeper [Heavy Pistol, Acc 4, DV 7P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 8 (m), w/ 30 rounds regular ammo]

AIDEN WAGNER (KE/RUNNER)

A young man with a good head on his shoulders and a solid upbringing, Aiden's kidnapping has put him in a bad place. He's trying to make the best of it, though, including working both sides of the law if he can. He doesn't believe in killing and will make sure to work with teams that know he works both sides of the law.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG	M
4	4	5(8)	4	3	3	3	3	6.0	4	4

Condition Monitor	10/10
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 5
Physical Initiative	8(9) + 2D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Clubs 3, Computer 1, Con 1, Disguise 1, Escape Artist 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms skill group 4, First Aid 1, Intimidation 3, Locksmith 2, Negotiation 1, Outdoors skill group 1, Perception 3, Sneaking 3, Throwing Weapons 3, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Bad Rep (Known member of KE), Code of Honor (Will only bring lethal force against those who first use it, protect the weak), Pain Resistance (1)
Adept Powers	Critical Strike (Unarmed Combat) 0(.5 PP), Improved Ability (Unarmed Combat) (3, 1.5 PP), Improved Reflexes (1, 1.5 PP), Improved Senses (low-light vision, 0.25 PP), Light Body (1, 0.25 PP),
Gear	Climbing gear, flashlight, glasses [Rating 3, w/ image link, smartlink], lockpicks, maglock passkey (Rating 3), respirator (Rating 4), Sony Emperor commlink (Device Rating 2), survival kit, Urban Explorer jumpsuit
Weapons	Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5(7), DV 11P, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2, 42(c), w/ smartgun system, 4 spare clips, 420 rounds regular ammo, 200 rounds explosive ammo] Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP –5, SA, RC —, 4(m), w/ 20 taser darts] Extendable baton [Clubs, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 6P, AP —] Fichetti Security 600 [Light Pistols, Acc 6(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC (1), 30(c), w/ detachable folding stock, laser sight, concealed holster, 300 rounds regular ammo] Flash-bang grenades (2) [Grenades, DV 10S, AP –4, Blast 10m Radius] HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ integral sound suppressor, retractable stock, smartgun system, 2 spare clips, 280 rounds regular ammo] Smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius] Thermal smoke grenades (2) [Grenades, DV —, AP —, Blast 10m Radius]

JAN WAGNER

Jan came over to Ares at an early age when his father was extracted from Saeder-Krupp based on his research into advanced arcane principles. When Jan didn't Awaken, his father was disappointed. His father's disappointment drove Jan to push his way up through the corporate ranks without the "easy road" of the Awakened. He's worked hard to earn his position with the company and already outranks his dad in the company's hierarchy.

When his son was tested and shown to have the Talent, Jan decided to be the exact opposite of his father. He nurtured the difference between the two and has instilled in his son both a respect for the power he was born with and the value of working for what you want.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
2	3	2	3	5	5(8)	4	5	6.0	3

Condition Monitor	10/11
Armor	13
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 7(9), Social 7
Physical Initiative	7 + 1d6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Close Combat skill group 3, Diving 3, Firearms skill group 4, Free-Fall 3, Influence skill group 8, Computer 4, First Aid 2, Navigation 1, Pilot Aircraft 4, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pilot Watercraft 2
Qualities	Analytical Mind, Prejudice (Biased, Wagemages)
Augmentations	[all betaware] Cerebral booster 3, datajack, dermal plating 4, mnemonic enhancer 3, sleep regulator
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 1, select sound filter 2], glasses [Capacity 4, w/ low-light vision, image link, smartlink, vision enhancement 1], Transys Avalon commlink [Device Rating 6, w/ satellite link]
Weapons	Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP –1, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartgun system, concealable holster]

WHITE RABBIT

Beginning to work on Pax's plan to develop a massive Dissonance pool in the city of Boston, White Rabbit is out trying to get control of some major computing areas to get the processing power for his master's plan. Named for his red eyes and puffy white hair, he is also always down the rabbit hole and has a crazy look in his eyes all the time. His name may sound all cute and cuddly, but he's vicious and has little problem attacking to kill or cause serious bodily harm.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG	RES
2	5	4	2	4	5	6	4	6.0	5	6

Condition Monitor	9/10
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 7, Social 6
Physical Initiative	10 + 1D6
Matrix Initiative	12 + 4D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 2, Automatics 4, Compiling 3, Computer 6, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 6, First Aid 1, Hacking 7, Hardware 5, Sneaking 4, Software 6
Qualities	Focused Concentration 3, Home Ground (Digital turf [Hub Grid]), Natural Hardening
Living Persona	DR - 8, A - 4, S - 6, D - 5, F - 4
Complex Forms	Cleaner, Diffusion of Firewall, Infusion of Firewall, Editor, Pulse Storm, Resonance Spike, Static Veil, Static Bomb, Transcendent Grid
Gear	Armor jacket [12], 50 datachips (blank), data tap, headphones [Capacity 6, w/ audio enhancement 3, select sound filter 3], contacts [Capacity 3, w/ low-light vision, vision enhancement 2]
Weapons	HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 5S(e), AP -5, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 28(c), w/ 2 spare clips, 60 rounds stick-n-shock ammo]

WICKED GANGER ROOFRUNNER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Black and purple are the colors that represent the bumps and bruises this gang earns as they practice their art. Living in the urban jungle and often stalking prey to prove their skill as they leap from roof to roof unseen, the gang shows an athletic skill rivaled by few.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	M
4	7	5(7)	4	3	3	5	5	6.0	5

Condition Monitor	10/10
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 6(7), Mental 5, Social 7
Physical Initiative	10(12) + 3D6
Active Skills	Clubs 4, Con 1 (Fast-Talk +2), Escape Artist 3, Etiquette 2 (Street +2), First Aid 2, Gymnastics 7 (9) (Parkour +2), Intimidation 3, Locksmith 3, Navigation 2 (Urban +2), Perception 3, Running 7 (Urban +2), Sneaking 4, Survival 1 (Urban +2), Throwing Weapons 3, Unarmed Combat 5 (7) (Touch Attack +2)
Qualities	Natural Athlete, Pain Resistance 1
Adept Powers	Improved Ability (Unarmed Combat) (2, 1 PP), Improved Ability (Gymnastics) (2, 1 PP), Improved Reflexes (2, 2.5 PP), Improved Senses (low-light vision, 0.25 PP), Light Body (1, 0.25 PP),
Gear	Climbing gear, glasses [Rating 1, w/ image link], lockpicks, Meta Link commlink, Urban Explorer jumpsuit
Weapons	Extendable baton [Club, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 6P, AP —] Throwing knives (2) [Throwing Weapon, Acc 6, DV 5P, AP –1] Shock Gloves [Unarmed Combat, Reach -, Acc 6, DV 8S(e), AP -5]

ZOH ROTHBERG

Rothberg's subtle Irish beauty blends with the tall stature granted by her half-German ancestry, creating a mix of attraction rarely seen in a human. The addition of her sultry Irish brogue makes her words only complement her beauty. As the voice of Celedyr, Rothberg is not used to dealing with street-level folks and her attitude toward runners will be one of distant disdain. She knows that the runners are a necessity in the plans of her master, but that doesn't make the work any easier. She is a cold professional with no tolerance for unprofessionalism.

METATYPE: HUMAN

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
5(+1)	5	4	3	0	5	3	7	1.0	6

Condition Monitor	11/11
Armor	9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 8, Social 9
Physical Initiative	10 + 1D6
Active Skills	Athletics skill group 3, Computer 3, Etiquette 7 (Corporate, Draconic +2), Leadership 6, Negotiation 8 (Contracts +2), Perception 4, Pistols 2
Qualities	Exceptional Attribute (Charisma), Photographic Memory, Toughness
Augmentations	Datajack
Gear	Armor vest [9], earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ select sound filter 1], flashlight, glasses [Capacity 4, w/ image link]
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ spare clip, 110 rounds regular ammo]

MCT IRON DRAGON DRONES

(MODIFIED STEEL LYNX)

HAND	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS
5	5	3	6	14	4	4	—

Weapons	Stoner-Ares M202 [MMG, Acc 5 (7), DV 10S, AP –2, FA, RC —, 100 (belt), w/ gel ammo]

DRAGONFLY DRONES

HAND	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS
4	2	2	1	0	3	3	—

Weapons	Self-destruct [DV 10S, AP –, Blast 5m Radius]

FAMILIAR FACES

A.J. tried to enjoy how good it felt to be around familiar faces again. Spending almost a month scrambling to survive with a revolving door of teammates or running solo seemed all the more miserable when he was finally back working with a small group he had come to trust with his life through years of friendship.

But it wasn't all sunshine and roses. They'd all been changed by their time away from each other, by their time fighting tooth and nail to survive in the chaos of the early days and then taking work where and when it came as the QZ settled into its dark future.

Happy to be back in good company, unsure how long it was going to last.

"We got another call from Rothberg. I know she's not your favorite, but the nuyen spend just the same." Nash's voice came from the doorway. When A.J. turned from the table, he saw the team's rigger leaning against the doorframe. The ork's nondescript dark-blue coveralls were folded and tied at the waist to reveal his dirt- and oil-stained t-shirt below.

"Never let anyone say I let my personal issues get in the way of the team making money," A.J. replied with a laugh. He took the last of his cold cup of soykaf like a shot of good whiskey. "I'll call her now."

"No need. I told her we'd be meet her at Whipple's," Nash said with a smile. "I know you, A.J. You got a wild streak, a mean streak, and a horrible sense of humor, but when it comes to work, you're all pro."

A.J. wasn't happy that Nash had taken the meeting, and he was even less happy at the location. He hated meeting on someone else's turf, even if it was virtual. Whipple's was a former Novatech spot, now owned by NeoNET and turned into a space-themed virtual club/museum. The whole place was dedicated to Novatech's failed comet probe back before Crash 2.0. It was depressing to say the least, but the worst part was that everything in the place would bend to the every whim of NeoNET Matrix Security. MatSec gave NeoNET's Johnson, Zoh Rothberg, all the cards when it came to monitoring the meeting.

"If it bites us in the ass, consider this my 'I told you so.'" A.J. canceled the dialing he had already started on his headware link. "Everyone else—we got work coming in."

"Yup," Nash said, this time a little sheepish.

"Making your face the last to know? Not chill." A.J. shook his head as he spoke and looked at the ork disapprovingly.

"Thought I might need backup if you got your panties in a wad," Nash said. His tone said he was trying to be funny.

"Glad we didn't have to help," said Brutus' distinctive deep voice from the other room.

A.J. shook his head in humorous disbelief. He was wondering how only a few moments earlier he could have been contemplating how nice it was to have familiar faces around. They were often a pain in his ass. But at least they were a familiar pain.

A.J. hated VR meetings. Personas lacked personality. Programmers could add whatever code they wanted and the most meek and soft-hearted sap in the meat world could look like a cold negotiator in the Matrix. Tells, twitches, and nervous habits were all ways to know when you could push for more cash, take the deal, or cut and run if it looked like a set up, but in the Matrix they didn't exist. It also didn't help that A.J. hated having to use an external link. He had no desire to get the 'ware in his head fried, so he used a throwaway for meets. Luckily, Paimon had at least modified the persona on his Meta Link to look a little better than the rather boring androgynous white figure.

A.J.'s trilby-wearing grey figure stood among the crowd of other virtual patrons inside Whipple's. The majority of the personas were NeoNET employees relaxing after a hard day at work. Their appearances varied, but most of them fell within normal range of customization allowed on midrange commlinks. None of them looked like the distinctive full-custom jobs that most hackers put together for themselves.

A.J. mingled with the locals, trying to overhear bits of conversation and see if anything interesting was going on inside the NeoNET Towers, where most of them were physically located. Most of the talk was the boring everyday stuff of someone living high above the trouble around them. He caught some chat about the trouble on the lower floors, likely referring to the head case issues the Towers had on their lowest floors, but that was nothing new.

As 1900 rolled over on the clock, a floating doorway appeared in front of A.J. He logged onto the private host and stepped through the door into a small virtual office. A tall, strawberry-blonde persona stood nearby, looking out a virtual window over what appeared to be a real, live-captured view of Boston. It was the actual view from her office window, and A.J. knew it was meant to impress, to make sure whoever was meeting with her knew that her office sat at the top of Central Tower, the highest of the NeoNET Towers.

It didn't impress him. In fact, he found it infuriating. The view reminded him of how detached this woman was from the reality of the lives she manipulated. The puppetmaster controlling her expendable marionettes living in the hell below.

The QZ had settled down a little, but it was still a fight every day to draw breath. But not for Zoh Rothberg, former Voice of Celedyr, now stuck in the cage with the rest of the animals.

A.J. had his doubts on that. He often wondered if her position as the Voice had simply changed from a media role to a full-time role as Celedyr hid within the QZ. He was one of three dragons still inside the zone according to the rumors—the others were Elohann, the cause of the nightmare according to the rumor mill, and Damon. A.J. could believe that Damon still inside, but Celedyr? That was a stretch—it took a lot to keep a great dragon from doing as they pleased. Usually, it took another great dragon.

"Good evenin', A.J.," Rothberg said in her soft Irish brogue.

"Good evening, ma'am," A.J. replied. "I believe you have work for my team?"

"No friendly banter, no idle conversation to soften the mood, no warm-up to gauge my mood and get a sense of my malleability for negotiations? I'm not sure how I should take that." Rothberg let her accent thicken as she spoke.

A.J. had dealt with Rothberg before. Her accent was cute and at times made her sound like an innocent girl, but he knew enough not to be fooled. She had depths he hadn't begun to fathom.

"I save my banter for social and personal visits. If you wanted to fly me up to the Tower I'd be happy to banter with you until the cows came home," A.J. paused briefly, "I didn't think so. So what's the job?"

Rothberg turned and leaned over the back of the high-backed desk chair. A.J. had seen real images of the woman, and the persona's likeness was remarkable, taking full advantage of NeoNET's vaunted tech prowess.

"Reconnaissance and investigation," Rothberg said flatly.

A.J. knew what that meant. A trip north. Salem had become a mysterious place since the QZ started. Rumors circulated daily about portals to other dimensions, metaplanar monsters on the prowl, megacorporate experiments running rampant, a dragon devouring all the children, the corporations making rumors to keep people away and then slowly releasing people after they were cured, and hundreds more. Some were fantasies of those who wished to escape the horrible nightmares of those who had succumbed to the misery of a severed life, but it was all a load of drek. No one but the people in Salem knew what was going on in Salem, and A.J. was pretty sure they liked it that way.

He had met a young man who had been there. Shortly after the quarantine began, this adventurous fellow set forth on a quest to explore the QZ. He traveled the north and got chased out by trained dogs and a kindly spirit that understood the kid was more of a threat to himself than others.

The kid had actually done a decent job of poking around Salem back then, getting a feel for the place while it was in transition, but that was then. Now was another story.

"Where?" A.J. asked, though he already knew the answer.

"Salem," Rothberg confirmed. "Seven thousand five hundred for each of the six members of your team. I want reports on four groups in the area."

"One hundred K. We'll split it how we see fit," A.J. replied with zero hesitation.

Rothberg's eyes narrowed, and she lifted a single eyebrow. A.J. wasn't sure what was going through her head but he knew his counteroffer was way high. It was a negotiator's ploy meant to tell him a number of things while increasing the size of the middle ground they'd eventually meet. Her reaction was interesting. She didn't look shocked or insulted; instead she was curious and thoughtful. It could have been part of the persona coding, but A.J. doubted it. This persona was too close to the real thing.

Regardless, it honestly wasn't a good sign. A.J. had jumped so high for another reason, far more personal—he didn't want to work for her or her company.

"For a hundred thousand nuyen I expect thorough results. That was why I was hiring your team in the first place," Rothberg smiled as she spoke and tapped a virtual keyboard on her virtual desk. "One quarter now, the rest on delivery of the reports."

A.J.'s headware link reported an incoming transaction. Twenty-five thousand nuyen from an account in Zurich Orbital Gemeinshaft Bank. He was shocked. For a moment he actually stood silent and stunned. This was bad news. Rothberg had already paid almost two-thirds of her original total offer and agreed to over double the initial offer. Something was going to go sideways on this run, and badly.

When he finally regained his composure, A.J. spoke. "Who and where are the four groups?"

"I'll transfer a datafile." The persona tapped a few more virtual keys, and a manila folder appeared in front of A.J. All the extra flourishes and movement for Rothberg's persona weren't necessary, making A.J. almost positive the coding on it was designed to mimic the real woman's actions.

With a thought and no movement from his persona A.J. downloaded the file and then stored it on his headware link instead of the unsecured Meta Link. He'd read it over later. The deal was struck and no matter who was listed in that file, the team had a job to do. A.J. tried to convince himself that was the whole reason, but deep down he knew it wasn't. He really didn't want any more time to think about how this run could blow up.

"If you have no more questions, you can contact me at the number in the datafile. Feel free to use it anytime." Rothberg's persona gave an odd smile, that single eyebrow raise, and a slight lowering of her head. It was the kind of look A.J. would see as flirtatious in the real world. He'd seen it many times before, but without the oddness in the smile. It reminded him of a crocodile smiling at a baby gazelle stuck in the mud.

"We'll contact you when the job's done," A.J. said coldly and then jacked out.

"Rain, head in the game." Brutus' voice was a harsh clip over the audio link in A.J.'s cyberears.

"Sorry, B. Headache again. Eyes aren't focusing right. I'll run it through the scope's imaging instead," Rain replied. His feed immediately switched from the blurry and shaky cybereye feed to a crisp magnified shot from his rifle's imaging scope, complete with crosshairs laid over the target's chest.

A.J.'s worries rose again. It wasn't the first time Rain had complained of headaches and focusing issues. The team's long gun and long-range surveillance man had also mentioned exhaustion and memory issues lately. Rain thought it was the result of too many concussions, including a recent one from a close encounter of the troll-fist kind, but A.J. had a different idea that he kept to himself while he kept an eye on his friend and running mate.

"You all seeing what I'm seeing?" Paimon asked over the team's comms.

A.J. put his attention back on the feeds on his AR HUD. He didn't manage to spot the issue before Nash clued him in.

"Tats on the neck. They're Aztec. He's either a Jaguar Guard, or he never lets anyone from Aztechnology see his ink. They happily grab impersonators to participate in their special ceremonies," the rigger said with a chuckle.

"Get high res stills. It's not enough to confirm the ID for Zoh, but this place might just be a whole lot of circumstantial," Brutus said.

"My neo-Nahuatl is pretty good. We can still go with my plan," A.J. piped in. He had offered to head down and do some street work, but Brutus wasn't a fan of putting anyone that close to danger if their suspicions were correct. And it looked like they were.

"Not a fan of Rothberg, but you'll get that close to the heart-rippers for her info," Nash said. "A.J. my old friend, you are a strange cat sometimes. That adrenal addiction is going to get you in serious trouble one of ... oh wait, it already has. Many times."

"My dislike for Rothberg is personal. This is professional. We're being paid to do a job, and I intend to do it well," A.J.'s tone was all business, but there was a personal part of him that just wanted to rub Rothberg's face in the things he and his team could do that her own people could not.

"We got time, and we still need to do initial recon on site four. Rain, break off and head there. We'll keep eyes on here for a few more hours and then head your way once you're in place. Burst on channel one-one when you're there. Radio silence until Paimon gives you the all clear. Dorian, send a raven to keep tabs." Brutus issued commands like the natural tactical leader he was.

"Confirmed, radio silent now." Rain's feed on A.J.'s HUD went blank first and then closed out completely.

"Raven on watch. How apropos for such a place as this," Dorian said.

The rest of them continued to grab audio and video footage from the town of Swampscott. The place was normal at first glance, but any extended observation would give a trained eye reason to pause. The small neighborhood had done what many of the neighborhoods in the QZ did to survive: They compressed their populations and built a barrier, in this case buses and overturned cars with sheet-metal walls on wooden platforms to make walkways on the tops of the vehicular wall.

The first odd thing A.J. had noticed upon arrival was the posture and positioning of their guards. Most were stationed on the rooftops, but none of them walked along the edge. They were all far enough back from the edge to give them a full view of the surrounding ground level but limiting their exposure to anything shooting from below. They didn't walk as much as prowl the roofs. Regular towns that A.J. had visited in his travels of the QZ usually put their guards on the lower walls and any of the armed civilians that patrolled from the roof walked within a meter of the edge to see as much terrain below as possible while accidentally exposing most of themselves to attacks.

Then there were the weapons. Brutus was the gun nut and had pointed out that almost every guard was kitted with an assault rifle and sidearm from Armamentos Murreta, Aztechnology's personal weapons brand. It was suspicious even before Paimon confirmed there was no Aztechnology facility in the area they could have raided. Paimon also pointed out the network the town was running had megacorporate-grade encryption, and all of the guards were on a closed communication network.

The hits added up after that. The neighborhood got extra supply drops that Nash confirmed were coming from Aztechnology-registered planes. Most of the people were speaking a foreign language that A.J. confirmed was neo-Nahuatl. And Rain had tapped a tinted window with a laser mic and caught the group inside performing what Brutus identified as an Aztec Sun ceremony. The tattoo was just more observational evidence. They still didn't have names or any official Aztechnology documentation, though, and that was what A.J. wanted.

What A.J. also wanted was a chance to talk to his team about something without Rain on comms, and now was the perfect opportunity.

"Anyone noticed any abnormalities in Rain's behavior lately?" A.J. asked.

"Whattaya mean boss?" Nash replied first.

"Yeah, like what?" Paimon followed right after.

"All of Rain's behavior is odd to me," Dorian added.

"Is this chatter necessary?" Brutus asked. A.J. figured Brutus might question the need for unnecessary comms use.

"It's important Brutus. And as for what, you tell me. Anything strange," A.J. didn't want to skew their answers with his own, possibly paranoid, observations.

"The headaches are odd. Him even getting hit by that troll is strange," Paimon said.

"He's been asking me a lot of questions about Zoh and NeoNET. He won't let me run diagnostics on his eyes either. I think they might be the issue more than any concussion. Regular 'ware maintenance is hard to come by in here," Nash added.

"A.J., spill it. What're you thinking?" Brutus asked.

A.J. considered waving the whole thing off, but he worried that the whole thing could come back to bite him in the ass if it turned out he was right. In the end he went with the truth. "I think Rain might be infected."

The others were quiet for a few seconds. A.J. could imagine their faces deep in thought, considering the possibility of Rain turning into a shambler, or worse, a rager. He'd be a terror. When someone finally spoke it was deep, calm voice of Brutus, "That could be a problem."

Others followed quickly as Paimon added, "We've got no way to verify that. Not until he snaps."

"When could it have happened?" Nash asked.

"I'm not sure. He operates solo so often it could have been anytime. We could run a test. There was that run we did for Evo. Paimon was pretty sure the device we grabbed was a scanner to test for nanites in their circuitry." A.J. was glad no one was flying into defensive mode. Calmer heads solved problems.

"Not a huge fan of that idea. It was hard enough getting it for them. I'm sure they'll have it under tighter security so they don't lose it again," Brutus said..

"Maybe they'll let us borrow it?" Nash said.

"Yeah, I'm sure they will hand it right over and ask no questions," Dorian said.

"Kill it, both of you. A.J., you serious?" Brutus said to get things back on track

"Wish I weren't," A.J. responded, "but Rain has our backs from way off. Too dangerous of a prospect to keep worrying. Best to know."

"All right. Let's get back on this op and then pull a side job after," Brutus got them back on task, but then added one more remark. "A.J., how's the funding look? I can put a chunk of my five K from this op in a kitty."

A.J., smiling where no one could see him, said, "That'd be great. I'll pool in some from my savings into the group kitty, too. A little from everyone, and we should have operating expenses covered."

A.J. watched the door shudder from another impact. Brutus had been rocked back off the door on the hit before that and hadn't made it back in place yet. A.J.'s activated reflex system allowed him to detect the bending of the door with each hit. It was only a fraction of a millimeter, but by one fraction at a time, the things on the other side of that door were getting closer to the runners.

From the corner of his vision A.J. saw Dorian's body twitch on the floor next to him. The elf coughed out the dust his body had inhaled while his soul was off galavanting on the astral. Dorian sat up and pulled himself back against the wall to continue his coughing fit.

"What'd you see?" Paimon asked frantically.

Dorian held up a finger and continued his coughing fit. A.J. noticed for the first time just how much dust was hanging in the air from all the impacts straining the stone door frame.

"Fuck a minute. We ain't got the time," Nash called from the window where he watched the grounds below.

"Ease off, all of you," A.J. cut in. "Rain, what's the situation on the roof?" Another impact punctuated his question better than any vocal inflection.

"They're all over," Rain reported. "Three-sixty coverage. I count one-nine-six—yeah, you heard me—on the outside. They're jamming the outer door, traffic must be tight in there."

A.J. rose from his crouched position and peeked over the half-wall of the church balcony. Below, the nave was an undulating mass of bodies bumping and shoving toward the narthex. Approaching the stairs of the tower that led to the runner's position on the balcony. It was a mass of shamblers like A.J. had never seen before. He slipped back below the lip without being spotted.

"Way out," Dorian coughed, "below the altar." He managed to get the words out before another coughing fit started.

"Christ, Dorian, stop coughing, we need more info," Nash said. A.J. didn't know if he was serious or not.

"That and worse," Brutus said just before an impact sent him tumbling to the ground. A.J. looked to the door and could see it was starting to have visible play. They didn't have much time left.

"Dorian," A.J. grabbed the elven mage's collars and locked eyes with him. "Three questions, shake yes or no. Will we fit?" A nod. "Can you summon us some cover?" A nod, but A.J. could see the doubt in his eyes. "Can you bring the hellfire if we haul your ass out?" A nod, and this time the iron returned to his eyes.

"Brutus, you got the details. What's the plan?" A.J. said, turning back to the door. But Brutus wasn't there. A.J. scanned quickly and saw Brutus lying, unmoving, a few meters away. He sprang across the distance but knew what happened halfway there when he could see the odd angle of his friend's neck between the pews. "Brutus is down. Paimon, strip him. Rain, get back in here. Nash, get your roto in here. Dorian, get us a little friend, and keep yourself conscious."

A.J.'s orders were followed without comment, though Paimon let some emotion out when he choked up at the sight of his big friend's neck. A.J.'s plan had relied on Brutus being able to carry Dorian if he put himself out from casting strain, but that had to change. An impact on the door coincided perfectly with Nash's Rotodrone crashing through a stained-glass window. A.J. looked up and saw Rain quietly sliding down a rope back to the balcony.

"Dorian, tell your latest friend to be ready to flip the altar for us and then cover our escape. When we're clear, he can be clear. I know how you roll, don't ask the spirit to sacrifice itself. Rain, you slip down and get a good spot to cover us dropping into the hole and then follow. Paimon, lead the way. Spray and pray with Brutus' AK. He'd like that. Dorian, stay close to Paimon and keep him covered. Nash, you lose a friend. When we go, put a roto over the hole. Cut 'em up if they try to follow. I'll send Rain ahead of me and be the last man down. Everything on my go. Let's get out of here and tell everyone the story of how Brutus saved all our asses." A.J. did his best authoritative tactical voice, but he wasn't Brutus.

A.J. gave his old friend one last look and then called, "Go!"

"I'm kind of glad the light down here isn't great. A.J., I don't think you look so good," Rain said as he shifted the glowing green chemstick toward A.J.'s face.

"Fuck off," A.J. retorted and then immediately regretted letting his teeth touch his lips as he tasted coppery blood. It wasn't his, it was from the rain of blood that came down the narrow hole as the shamblers converged on the team's narrow escape route and the Rotodrone pureed them. He tried not to think about what else was in the blood, like millions of nanites that might be working their way into his system and trying to turn him into a shambler, a rager, a head case, or whatever else anyone wanted to call these freaks. He had a little internal laugh at the thought of him and Rain joining forces. Double trouble.

It was hard to imagine a friend turning. A.J. had never been a big horror trid fan, so all the references to zombie movies people had been making in comparison to the quarantine went right over his head. He did think he understood at least one of the concepts they talked about. This universal theme of sacrifice, the moment when a friend gets infected and you took care of them yourself. He looked at Rain and tried to imagine him as a shambler or a rager and then thought the same for himself. He hoped he had friends good enough to not let that happen.

Trekking through the narrow tunnels under the church wasn't pleasant. He wasn't sure when they were constructed. There were so many eras in New England's history when tunnels like this may have been needed. Beneath the altar had been an entrance to a small crypt. It had definitely not been a pleasant experience to drop into a dark hole, see skeletal remains all around, and then have blood and bits of gore poured down over your head. A.J. had taken it well, but the strain of being covered in blood that could be crawling in nanites looking to get in and destroy his brain was starting to wear on him.

"Dorian," A.J. called ahead into the darkness. The sound seemed to go nowhere, absorbed by the earthen walls of the tunnels that led through a hole in the crypt wall.

"The comms work. Unless you enjoy making extra noise in unstable underground passages," came Dorian's voice in his ear. As if to emphasize the elf's point, dirt and dust fell from the ceiling.

A.J. mentally scolded himself but remembered to not make it a message to the others. He was further off his game than he thought. "Sorry. Got enough juice left for a quick clean-up. I need to get this gore off me," A.J. sent mentally.

"I can manage," Dorian whispered through the comms. "I'll hold where I am. Keep moving forward."

A.J. kept going and could see where the others ahead of him were squeezing past the tall elf pressed against the wall. The movement reminded him of their order, which he needed to change. "Rain, push to the front, scout ahead. Paimon and Nash, stick tight together, give Rain some breathing room. Dorian, you and I will bring up the rear."

Brief acknowledgments were returned all around, and everyone started switching positions. When A.J. reached Dorian, the elf waved his hands across his throat, then muted his throat mic and put the hand up to stop A.J.. While the pair stood there Dorian muttered under his breath while casting. A.J. felt the shift in weight as the blood and gore sloughed off and fell to the ground. He stepped forward and caught Dorian as the mage stumbled from the strain.

"You chill?" A.J. asked in a low whisper.

"Fine. Just need a second," Dorian replied a little louder and then stared directly into A.J.'s eyes. A.J. could see that the elf was fully alert and putting the weak knees on for show. After a good thirty seconds Dorian continued, "You sure it's wise to put Rain out in front."

"We're down Brutus. We have no choice. Need a shooter out front, and Rain's our shooter right now," A.J. sent through his headware link.

"I'll be honest. I've heard Rain say 'Geek the mage first' more times than I'd care to count. I feel I would be his first target, and ..."

"That's why you're back here," A.J. cut in. "I'll cover you. You send him off to snoozeville."

"Will do," Dorian said, and he straightened and appeared to regain his composure. "Thanks."

"Null persp," A.J. said aloud. "Let's move."

After another ten minutes in the tunnel, which seemed like hours to A.J., Rain called for the group to stop. They all waited quietly, though through his cyberears A.J. could hear Dorian's rapid heartbeat, Nash clicking his SMG stock into the extended position, and Paimon fidgeting the stock of Brutus' AK into his shoulder.

Somewhere behind them he could hear shuffling feet, but he knew it was far off. A.J. had run rope across a few beams shortly after his talk with Dorian. Rain had suggested it after Nash informed everyone that the Roto's camera was showing shamblers dropping into the tunnels just before he lost contact. The rope wouldn't stop them, but shamblers were remarkably clumsy and fell over all sorts of things.

"Shit, A.J., Nash is moving up," Paimon sent the message over the commlink to avoid making noise.

"Hold there. We're moving up," A.J. replied then spoke aloud to Dorian. "Move up. Nash's going off plan."

The rear pair started forward. They weren't ten steps before A.J. heard the sound behind him change. Shamblers were tripping and grunting as they struggled to stand with others tripping behind them and on top of them. It meant they had between ten and fifteen minutes until the first of them caught up. Hopefully Rain's delay wouldn't last that long.

When the rear guard reached Paimon, he was hard at work, clicking away at his virtual keyboard. "Thank the code, watch my meat," Paimon said with a gasp and then dropped to the ground. A.J. saw Paimon's devil persona blink into existence on his AR and then charge forward at a swirling black mass. The sight did not give A.J. a good feeling. The devil icon had his pitchfork and a wicked black shield out from the instant it formed. Paimon was duking it out with something on the Matrix, and A.J. and Dorian were on bodywatch. At least they could see what was going on.

Paimon was struggling to fight using AR and was on the defensive, but as soon as A.J. and Dorian came into sight he activated the offensive setting of his Configurator program and went full VR. The noise was brutal, but it was the same for his opponent. Or opponents, A.J. couldn't quite tell.

The amorphous black mass had come out of nowhere and gone after Nash's link when he moved up. Paimon seemed entirely focused on getting the mass off Nash and then fending it off as it came after him. A.J. didn't know how he could help. He didn't even know what the mass was.

The mass lashed out with smoky tendrils that formed into different shapes as they struck. Taloned claws raked at the shield, pixelating bits of the code in Paimon's Armor program. Canine jaws snapped closed, only virtual centimeters from his head. He returned the attacks, pitchfork jabbing forward into the blackness. He felt the sting in his arm as the code of the mass lashed back with biofeedback.

A.J. and Dorian looked on with a deep sense of helplessness. Neither was capable of cybercombat.

But A.J. was not entirely helpless. "Dorian, start dragging Paimon. Yell if you have trouble. Quiet time is over," A.J. sent the message on the run as he ran down the tunnel.

"Nash, Rain, situation?" A.J. spoke as he jogged in the darkness. His thermographic systems gave enough contrast between air and walls to allow him to move quickly. The faint print marks on the ground where the pressure of Rain and Nash's feet had warmed the dirt also helped. Nash's were newer and easier to

follow, but Rain's light step had still left some traces. The steps got brighter as he moved faster and caught up to the unresponsive pair.

Rain and Nash were not his goal though—they could take care of themselves and cover each other. A.J. wanted to find whatever was fighting Paimon. Over his own heavy breath, A.J. could hear a scuffle ahead. The sounds of hard fist impacts, not gunfire. He wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

The sound was getting louder and closer quickly. A.J. could see the prints turning a corner ahead, and the sound led him to believe the fight was just around the corner. He slowed and drew his pistol, making sure to change out the hollow-point rounds for gel before he popped his head around the corner to get a better view.

As his thermographic vision adjusted to the presence of warm figures, A.J. took a second to scan the room with the ghostly haze of heat trails in the air. Two figures were fighting in the center of a small room with smooth walls, but he couldn't identify either of the figures right away. There was more than two. Seated against two of the walls were eight metahuman masses, all slightly warmer than they should be. A.J. could see hot strings, likely wires, leading from their heads into the ceiling.

The strange heat patterns in the room weren't changing, so A.J. switched to low-light and activated the flashlight on his pistol while bringing it to bear on the fighting figures. He was surprised to see it was Nash and Rain. The flashlight hit Rain directly in the face, and his momentary blindness allowed Nash to land a crushing blow to the man's temple. Rain went down hard.

"Holy ghost A.J., am I glad to see you," Nash spoke in chopped phrases as he planted his hands on his knees and huffed to catch his breath.

"What the fuck is happening here?" A.J. asked as he looked at the eight figures, now revealed as six humans, an ork, and an elf. They all had datajacks with wires running up into the ceiling, and every one looked malnourished. As A.J. focused on the group for a moment, he spotted the battle between Paimon and the black mass going on in his AR feed. The difference was now he was behind the black mass.

Paimon looked to have taken some hits. The shield was chipped and worn, and Paimon's body was covered in tiny black bite and slash marks. It took only an instant for A.J. to realize the group on the ground were the ones controlling the black mass.

"They're fighting Paimon. Knock 'em out Nash." A.J. called out as he raised his big pistol.

"Whoa, wait," Nash cried out as he leapt in front of the jacked-in octet. "That's what Rain was trying to do. I stopped him. I don't think they are what we think they are."

A.J. considered his friend's words. He could still see the battle raging between Paimon and the blackness. It looked like it was coming from them, but if Rain was infected, why would he try to stop them? Unless it was the real Rain and not some infected personality. The confusion was hurting his brain something fierce.

"Maybe we should cut the wires. Dump 'em without shooting them," A.J. suggested. Nash looked at the wires for a brief second like he was considering it. He shifted his stance a few times as if pacing in place but kept himself between A.J. and the group on the floor. "Maybe pull the plug on one. See what happens," A.J. added as he tried to convince Nash.

"Well, maybe. These guys don't look healthy. That could kill them," Nash said.

A.J. saw Paimon take a hit that completely pixelated his shield. Time was short. A.J. pushed forward but tucked the pistol away as he moved. "I'm pulling one plug. If it helps Paimon, we'll pull the rest. If not, we're in deep shit."

A.J. wrapped his hand around the datacord and used the thumb switch to release the latch on the datajack. As his arm tensed to pull, A.J. felt cold metal pressed into the short hairs on the back of his head. "Not so fast, boss," Nash said from behind him, "Ease off the cord. Nice and slow."

A.J. considered his speed versus Nash's. A.J. knew he was faster, but all it took was one misstep and he was catching a bullet to the back of the head. He let up his thumb and Nash leaned off his head and took a few quick steps back. It was a smart move that put the rigger out of arms' reach.

"I'm not sure what to do with you. I know you're a pro and you don't take too much personally. But can you write this off? Can you let Paimon go? And Dorian? And Rain? They'd all come after me. They'd make it personal. But you, you're not as emotional. All that metal makes you cold. Even this job. You hate Rothberg. Why, I don't know, but I know you hate her, and yet you pushed to get all the data you could f—"

It happened in a blink. Literally. While Nash was talking A.J. was timing his vocal rhythm along with his blinks. It was an odd identification technique he had learned somewhere in his tradecraft days that was excellent for seeing through even the best nanodisguise. It had the secondary advantage of timing the moment when a person had zero visual perception. The ideal time to make a move.

By the time Nash was opening his eyes, A.J.'s Colt was drawn, passing gut height, and had already fired one round that was about to hit his turncoat friend in the shin. A.J. pulled the trigger a second time at solar plexus level and a third at where his smartlink system estimated Nash's head would be after first the two impacts. A.J. was sliding to his right as he fired, increasing the distance Nash would have to swing the SMG he carried.

All three rounds made solid contact, silencing and stumbling the villain during his soliloquy, but it wasn't enough to put him down. The SMG roared to life as Nash swung it around and past A.J..

Rounds pounded into A.J.'s gut and chest, but none of them penetrated the plates woven into the ballistic fabric. But that didn't mean it didn't hurt. The hits and his motion threw off A.J.'s aim, and several shots sailed wide of Nash who was also now

moving to his right. Nash sprayed rounds that slammed into A.J.'s body armor—front on purpose and back from ricochets.

A.J. was trying to conserve ammo, but he still popped off a few more shots as he got into position. He had circled the room and finally had a good line on what he really wanted. He fired repeatedly as he crossed the span of the room and then let himself slam into the wall to stop his movement. Nash continued to fire past him, and he didn't realize what A.J. was up to until it was too late. A.J. lined up the smartlink and fired two quick shots. The rounds, thick gel-filled sacs, slammed into Nash's right eye and then his exposed temple. Nash tumbled to the ground, flopping uncontrolled.

A.J. paused a moment to take in the scene. The AR display of the local Matrix showed a beaten and battered Paimon, but no black mass. The victory was not Paimon's to claim, though. It was a combination of A.J.'s and Nash's actions that led to the end of the blackness. Nash's initial blind spray had put rounds into five of the eight. Three of the wounds weren't serious but one was a gutshot—those killed slow—and the last was a clean shot through the head of the ork. They were enough to slow the blackness, but A.J. laying into the rest of them with nine gel rounds set the Matrix monstrosity up for Paimon's finishing touches.

The moment over, A.J. set to work tidying things up before Paimon and Dorian joined him or Rain woke up. He managed to bind Nash and the surviving members of the jacked octet, along with Rain just in case, before a bedraggled Paimon and exhausted Dorian stumbled into the room.

Over the next few minutes he briefed Paimon and Dorian on what had transpired before setting them to a few new tasks. He had expected Paimon to be upset that the Matrix victory was not his alone, but the hacker gave a hearty and genuine thanks. Dorian eyed the octet (now only a sextet) with a vindictive glare. He had offered to summon a spirit to do the deed if A.J. was squeamish. That step somehow made Dorian okay with killing in cold blood. If the spirit did it, it wasn't him. A.J. had tried to argue it once, but finally gave up, figuring that whatever helped Dorian sleep at night was okay. A.J. was not near as worried about what he had to do with the six—it was what he'd have to do with Nash and Rain that had him off-balance.

A.J. had team members scan the local area astrally while also looking for a solid Matrix connection. The astral around them was clear; they were in the basement of a small office building a half mile from the church. The Matrix was shoddy, and Paimon said the noise was too bad to do any real hacking. Calls, though, could be made and messages sent. After the recons were done, A.J. sent Paimon to follow the cables and Dorian to cover him. The look he gave both kept them from arguing and made sure they both understood to only return on orders or A.J.'s screams for help.

When they left, A.J. took a pair of stim patches from his kit and held them in his hands. He looked down at the two of them, arms trussed behind their backs and considered his plan. In the end he slapped them both at the same time and took a step back.

"WhatthefuckI'llkillyou,youpieceofshit!" Rain blurted all rolled together and flailed in his bonds. It took a moment for him to fully realize what was going on before he calmed and glared at A.J., "Ghost, A.J., untie me. Nash's gone batshit."

Nash's eyes were slowly coming around, and he shook his head repeatedly as if confused. Then he started to mumble. It was the same thing over and over, but eventually A.J. could make it out, "I have control. I can move. I have control."

"Easy. Both of you. Time for a chat," A.J. stood back from them and talked loud and clear.

"A.J.. It wasn't me. I'm not me. I'm me now. But I wasn't me then. I swear," Nash ranted. He looked over at Rain. "Rain, man, I'm so sorry. I must be infected. It's taking me over. I had to watch while it did everything. It was horrible. Please. Just kill me."

"Please do, A.J.," Rain added coldly.

"Not so fast, slick," A.J. said to Rain, "I'm not sure you're all there either. You got the signs, too."

"Are you fucking serious?" Rain spat the words. "I've been covering your ass for how many years. Don't you don't think I'd tell ya if I was gettin' squirrelly? Well, ain't that a big ol' fuck-you!"

"It's not him A.J.. It's me. I'm infected. Give me your gun. I'll do myself. Please. Let me end this. I can't keep watching the horror show from inside my own head," Nash pleaded.

A.J. thought about it. He owed Nash the courtesy of letting him do it. A.J. certainly didn't want innocent blood on his hands, especially the innocent blood of his own friend. There was nothing he could do if Nash was infected. After a few seconds, A.J. pulled the big Colt 2066 out of his holster and laid it in his old friend's lap. He slipped a knife from his belt and cut the plastic tie that bound Nash's hands.

Rain scrambled away from the pair. "Are you fucking nuts A.J.? That thing is full of shit. If you can't see that, you're fired as our face. You must be fucking blind."

"Don't worry Rain. It'll be over soon," Nash said apologetically as he grabbed the big pistol and pressed it to his chin.

A.J. turned away and Rain screamed, "A.J. look out!" But A.J. didn't move at all. He heard the dry click of the trigger pull, but the Colt was empty.

When A.J. heard Nash trying to scramble to his feet, he spun and planted his boot square in the chest that had once belonged to his old friend. He popped his second Colt from the holster with a shrug of his shoulder and leveled the big pistol at the head of what once was Nash.

"Can I still be your face?" A.J. said while looking at Rain. Then he pulled the trigger.

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FIN

VOICES OF DISASTER

The voices are getting louder. Strange voices, dissonant voices, sometimes babbling nonsense, sometimes telling stories too unbelievable to be true. People are falling prey to the voices, losing their identities as someone or something else slips into their skin. It's affecting people at all levels of society, from squatters in burned-out warehouses to corporate CEOs. It's spreading, and no one can figure out how to stop it. Boston-based NeoNET is at the center of this storm, and panic is spreading through the streets of the northeastern sprawl. People are scared and people are dying, which means that there are large sums of money to be made by any shadowrunner willing to brave those chaotic streets. Finding work won't be the problem. Getting out of the sprawl, however, will be.

Lockdown is a plot sourcebook for *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* with plot hooks, setting details of Boston, character details, and surprising reveals that will keep characters on their toes and running for their lives. With rich plot information and game mechanics for a new breed of cognitive fragmentation disorder sufferers, *Lockdown* can play a vital role in enthralling *Shadowrun* campaigns while continuing the unfolding story of the Sixth World.

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